

Invoking Nationalism in Young India: Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The young of India, a country with a rich cultural and linguistic history, have shown a rising propensity to invoke nationalism in recent years. To harness this feeling for the nation's security, a new programme has been proposed: the Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms of 2022. Increasing the number of troops, better weaponry and equipment, and better-armed force training are all part of this plan to improve India's military system. Underpinning this strategy is the belief that a robust military is necessary to protect and advance the nation. The Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms of 2022 also aim to enlist young people in the nation's defence. This strategy is based on the understanding that India's youth are the nation's future and that their enthusiasm and dedication to the defence of their country may be an advantage. The Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms of 2022 is an important milestone in India's attempts to modernise its military and instil national pride and solidarity in its populace, especially its young people.

A review article on "Invoking Nationalism in Young India: Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms 2022" will aim to do just that by analysing the strategy in great detail, looking at how it can affect India's security and sense of national identity. The article would thoroughly analyse the Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms 2022, dissecting its objectives, tactics, and proposed methods for putting them into action. It would also evaluate the policy's possible influence on India's young people and how well it achieves its stated goals. This review study aims to provide light on the larger implications of the Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms 2022 for India's defence and national identity. Any Indian policymaker, researcher, or academic interested in the relationship between military, nationalism, and young people in India will find this book invaluable.

NATIONALISM AND DEFENCE POLICY

The Republic of India, often known as the Land of Diversity, is a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic country. India, the world's most populous democracy and the country with the second-largest population, is a melting pot of cultures and peoples. Individuals of many different cultures and faiths call this place home. Despite all the differences, there is still a strong sense of community among the people. Pride in one's country is what brings people together. The nation's citizens are united by their shared patriotism and love for their country.

The Constitution of India is the highest law of the land. It guarantees everyone's right to social, economic, and political justice, freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, equality of status and opportunity. It encourages fraternity among its citizens to uphold each person's inherent worth and the nation's integrity as a whole.

Chak de India is a 2007 Hindi film about a coach who is motivated to put together a championship-caliber women's hockey team, and she begins by inquiring about the players' homelands. He won't accept replies that include their home state (such "Andhra Pradesh" or "Punjab"), so they have to declare they're from India instead. "Why would the athletes tell a coach who already knew that they were Indians that they were Indian?" The reason is obvious: the coach sought to foster a sense of patriotism among the players as a unifying force. The concept of the nation-state as an entity is paramount.

Nationalism, in a broad sense, refers to a sentiment of oneness, a belief in the goodness of one's nation and its people, a willingness to celebrate and celebrate differences, and a sense of pride, love, and respect for one's

country. One must grasp what it means to be a country to comprehend nationalism, which is an intense loyalty to one's homeland.

Europe is the birthplace of the modern notion of a nation-state. The concept of the modern nation-state was formed in Western Europe around the 17th century. According to this paradigm, it is only natural for a people to form their nation if they inhabit the same geographic area and have the same cultural norms (e.g., language and religion). This sense of national pride was a driving force in establishing new states.

Nationalism is a phrase that has been used and defined in many contexts. "A mental condition in which the person owes his or her highest allegiance to the nation-state," as one definition puts it. It suggests a feeling of unity between the people and their government. People in this area have a similar way of life and philosophy, a shared sense of destiny and a similar history, customs, and traditions. There is a negative correlation between nationalism and criminality. Countries with strong nationalism tend to have lower crime rates. This is because national pride prioritises loyalty to one's country above affection for one's fellow citizens. As a result, many individuals think twice before committing a crime against their kind. Corrupt practises are also uncommon in these nations. Nationalists at heart should never become involved with corrupt officials. They don't want to hurt their nation and feel bad about doing so. "JC Johari" claims that (1996),

"the meaning of nationalism has its different connotations if we examine the case of free versus subject's peoples. Whereas nationalism of the free peoples appeared in the modern period after the decline and fall of the papacy and the nation-states of Europe took upon themselves the emerged as a reaction against the imperial system of the advanced European countries."

National identity and nationalism emerged in India only after centuries of colonial control by the British. There were many different motivations fighting against a shared adversary that led to the emergence of nationalism. The introduction of cartridges (made with pig and cow fats), the widespread mistreatment of Indians throughout all sectors of society, the excessive exploitation of Indian resources, etc. Up until 1857, however, everyone was waging their struggle. With the uprising of 1857, Indian nationalism was ingrained in every Indian's mentality.

During India's fight for independence from the British, the notion of nationalism took shape. Anti-colonial emotion, love for the country and its people, independence, self-rule, and the end of colonial rule: are the things that people often associate with Indian nationalism. Individuals of many diverse cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs banded together to combat colonial control, assisted by a shared anti-colonial feeling or sense of nationality.

Nationalist and patriotic sentiment was widely disseminated during this period, and numerous political figures and parties played important roles. They abandoned their prior philosophies and beliefs in favour of nationalism to unite around the common objective of gaining independence. The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 as the central coordinating body of the Indian nationalist movement.

Historically, Surendranath Banerjee is regarded as India's founding nationalist. Along with promoting nationalism via disseminating political ideas among the populace, he also established the Indian Association and the Indian National Congress. Indians often point to Raja Rammohan Roy as the person who began the present era of nationalism in India. On August 7, 1905, in the Calcutta Town Hall in Bengal, the "Swadeshi Movement," also known as the "Made in India" campaign, was launched. Together with the Swadeshi movement, a boycott campaign was initiated. Indians were urged by this initiative to cease buying British products and instead support local manufacturers.

With much success, the Swadeshi movement spread throughout India. Millions of individuals felt a renewed sense of national pride and a desire to defend their homeland due to this campaign. In addition to bolstering the liberation fight movement, the movement boosted the Indian textile industry, boosting the Indian economy.

Key figures in this uprising were Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Sri Aurobindo, Surendranath Banerjee, and Rabindranath Tagore. With the rise of nationalism, fresh dreams of India's independence emerged. The British were ultimately driven out of India by the country's passionate devotion to its independence, self-rule, and homeland.

On the 15th of August, 1947, India was officially recognised as a sovereign state. The rise of anti-colonial feeling in India, leading to the creation of a sovereign government, delineating the country's borders, and adopting the Constitution of India, is what we call the Indian Nationalism Movement.

Nationalism has numerous good outcomes. There are always campaigns to improve the country's cleanliness or charitable activities that people might participate in. Some individuals volunteer to organise such initiatives so that their country's infrastructure may grow and develop. These true patriots want to make their country the best it can be. In this situation, true nationalism has a beneficial impact by helping to improve the country's infrastructure. Concerned with possessions, they are. They have taken ownership of the situation and are committed to improving it. In addition, the people of a country may benefit much from positive forms of nationalism. Strong national pride may inspire people to work hard towards their objectives and realise their full potential. The American Dream is a perfect example of something everyone is familiar with. A wonderful illustration of nationalism. People are inspired and motivated to fight for their country's independence because of the strong emotions of nationalism they experience. Lastly, when the people of a country display national pride, it positively impacts the country's economy and ability to advance. The streaming community becomes larger when people gather for shared patriotism and pride. When they are in a stronger position, they can bargain more effectively worldwide.

In contrast, "Defense policy" describes the government's approach to defending its people and territory against foreign aggression. A nation's military strategy is heavily influenced by its level of nationalism. It is common for a nation's need for a robust defence strategy to stem from its desire to maintain its unique culture and political system. When people feel a strong need to defend their country and its boundaries, they may prioritise military spending and the development of cutting-edge weaponry. Moreover, a country's military strategy may be shaped by how its citizens see foreign threats due to the impact of nationalism. A country may take a more active defensive stance in response to any perceived danger to its sovereignty or territory if its people feel a deep sense of national identity is at stake. When a country's military might is used to symbolise national pride and identity, nationalism may lead to militarism. A more aggressive foreign policy, larger military budget, and rise in military capability are all possible outcomes.

Nationalism, in general, and defence policy are intertwined, with the former often influencing the latter. Nationalist sentiment shapes the objectives, values, and identity reflected in a country's military strategy.

ROLE OF YOUTH IN SHAPING INDIA'S FUTURE

The youth of a nation are its most valuable and active citizens. If they invest in their young people's education, health, and protection and assurance of their rights, emerging nations with a big youth population may see remarkable development. Undoubtedly, today's youth will be the world's most influential thinkers, doers, and doers in the coming years (Panda, 2018).

They are the future, but only if given the necessary resources to thrive now. The country's economy is about to go into overdrive when more people are looking for a job than there are food sources. Said, there have to be more people of working age than those who are reliant on government assistance.

With over 54% of its overall population under the age of 25, and over 62% in the working age group (15-59), India is one of the youngest countries in the world today. By 2020, it is predicted that India's average population age would be 29, compared to 40 in the United States, 46 in Europe, and 47 in Japan. We'll have a demographic advantage over other nations due to this. Young people nowadays are becoming more agitated and fighting to reduce inequality. Yet more work is needed to break the cycle of poverty, hunger, corruption, violence, and joblessness. Many of these vices are still widely practised, preventing our magnificent country from functioning in its true essence.

Despite being the greatest democracy in the world, India has yet to realise the social, political, and economic equality envisioned by our ancestors. Since 1947, Americans have worked to eradicate systemic injustices, including poverty, unemployment, lack of education, corruption, violence, sexism, and more. Regarding human development, human capital, global hunger, world happiness, inclusive development, and disease burden worldwide, India ranks 130th, 115th, 100th, 62nd, and 141st, respectively. India's standing on several development metrics has scarcely improved over time. The youth of India must step up and lead the charge to combat India's many disparities and help develop the country if it is to progress on these measures.

With a younger population, India has a demographic advantage. The fate of the country is in their hands. The growth of a nation benefits from the new ideas and perspectives of its young people. Nonetheless, young people should be provided with sufficient platforms to advocate for the betterment of society at large. Politics is the only forum for these views to be heard and their plans implemented. The next generation of political leaders, including the Prime Minister, Chief Minister, and Governor, has to be inspired to become involved.

Knowledge and unity, rather than experience, make the most of a person's voice. Such instances of the power of young people include the protests in Delhi for Nirbhaya case justice and India against corruption and the protests at Marina beach for Jallikattu, among others. India can become a highly developed if authority is delegated to its young people.

Ultimately, it's up to them to make a difference. The necessity of voting for the proper persons in positions of authority should be ingrained in young minds early via formal educational programmes. Teens and young adults have always been discouraged from participating in electoral politics. Getting young people interested in politics is important for the future of our country. They need training in anti-corruption campaigns that instruct them on how to see the signs of corruption, how to educate others, and what tactics to use to combat the problem. Good governance becomes a more feasible goal when young people are given a voice in civic life.

Most of the challenges facing our country need their help. There are many problems that India must address right now, but India's young people can find answers. They only need an opportunity to show what they can do. Young people may bridge the gaps between different cultural groupings. Unfortunately, racism persists in many parts of the globe today. Due to differences in hair and skin colour, people are picking fights with one another. Religion is a separate problem, and young people have the power to persuade their elders to live in harmony and love. We are all connected; let's not let our differences drive a wedge between us. The crime rate is rather high as well. Abused men are killing their wives. Intruders are breaking into people's homes and places of business. This crime and bloodshed must end immediately. Fortunately, today's young once again has the power to affect positive change in their nation.

Youth seems to be able to deal with all problems and difficulties. They are an inspiration to other young people. They may show them the good in life and teach them to appreciate it. Young people often take advice from those actively working to ruin their future. They'll help them value humanity and its consequences.

We need to listen to the advice of the mature young people today. Even though they have degrees, many cannot find work in the job market. They must get a chance to show the world how smart they are and to establish their identities. Young people need help from the government, Civil Society, volunteer organisations, and others if our country is to become a great and educated. These will have a tremendous impact on people's lives and the planet at large. Children and young people are the future of our country. They're going to do great things for the United States. The nation will finally be acknowledged. The kids will step up to the plate if given the proper resources and a welcoming atmosphere on the local, regional, state, national, and global levels.

Young people play a key part in constructing a strong country. They are ambitious, creative thinkers who are a force for good among their peers and the country. They can forge their path and propel the country forward. Yet they won't succeed unless they get help from adults and other young people. The next generation will then be able to take their country to new heights of prosperity.

Importance of youth in shaping defence policy

The youth play a crucial role in shaping defense policy. They represent the future of the nation, and their ideas and perspectives can shape the direction of the country's defense policy for years to come. Here are some reasons why youth are important in shaping defense policy:

- **Fresh Perspective:** Young people bring a fresh perspective to defense policy discussions. They are often less bound by tradition and can approach policy issues with an open mind. This can lead to new and innovative ideas that older generations might not consider.

- **Technology Savvy:** The youth are often more tech-savvy than older generations. In today's world, technology is a critical component of defense policy. Therefore, young people's knowledge of emerging technologies can contribute to developing effective defense policies.
- **Future Leaders:** The youth are the future leaders of the country. Therefore, involving them in defense policy discussions is essential to ensure that future policies are sustainable and effective.
- **Nationalistic Spirit:** The youth are often more nationalistic than older generations. This can lead to a greater interest in and support for defense policy, resulting in a more robust and effective defense strategy.

In conclusion, involving the youth in shaping defense policy is critical to ensuring the policies are relevant, effective, and sustainable. The youth bring fresh ideas, technology skills, nationalistic spirit, and diversity of thought to defense policy discussions, making them a valuable asset in developing robust and effective defense strategies.

AGNIPATH DEFENCE POLICY

Defense Minister Rajnath Singh introduced the Agnipath programme on June 14th, signalling a major change in how the military has been hiring for the Other Ranks (ORs). The centrepiece of this reform is a new four-year engagement term known as "colour service," after which only up to 25 percent of each class of Agniveers will be admitted into the regular ranks to serve a minimum of 15 more years. However, these 25% permanent hires will not be eligible to receive pension benefits based on their four years of Agniveers employment (Hooda, 2022). Enrollment will be open to anyone between 17.5 and 21, and selection will be made on a "All India all Class" basis. It is expected that 46,000 Agniveers would be hired in the first year.

A monthly composite wage of INR 30,000 is provided in the plan's first year, rising to INR 40,000 in the fourth year. All Agniveers are eligible for a variety of allowances, including those for risk and hardship, rations, clothing, and travel, as well as compensation for death or disability sustained on the job, which includes non-contributory life insurance in the amount of INR 48 lakh and an ex-gratia payment of INR 44 lakh. Nonetheless, agniveers will be a separate military branch from the others. In addition, they will not be considered former service members and hence will not be eligible for the Ex-Health Servicemen's System (ECHS) or the ability to shop at the military's Canteen Stores Department (CSD).

All Agniveers would get a severance package of around INR 11.71 lakh when their four-year term is ended, made up of 30% monthly payments from their wages, a matching contribution from the government, and interest collected.

Need of the Agnipath scheme

According to data shared by the Ministry of Defence with Parliament – more than one lakh positions for junior commissioned officers and other ranks are vacant in the Army. It also noted that while more than 90 recruitment rallies were held each year in 2017, 2018 and 2019, only 47 were held in 2020-2021, and just four in 2021-2022 due to the pandemic.

Aim of Agnipath Scheme

The plan's overarching objective is to transform the Army into a modern combat force that can adapt to changing battlefield conditions and defeat adversaries from all sides. The program's goals include bolstering national security and allowing young people to join the military. Moreover, it hopes to reduce the ever-increasing pay and pension costs. It also seeks to harness the potential of young people and prepare them to be future soldiers by making the armed forces more youthful, tech-savvy, and contemporary. After serving for four years, it will aid in rehabilitating the military member. They will be offered bridge courses and skill certifications as part of a "whole of government" strategy. The driving force will aim to inspire new business owners to start up.

Significance of Agnipath Scheme

For four years, the Agnipath military will be staffed by enlisted men and women known as Agniveers. After a six-month training phase, the recruits will serve for the remaining 18 months. As it is, a soldier's career spans between 17 and 20 years. The compensation would begin at Rs 30,000 and increase to Rs 40,000 after four years. They will get between 11 and 12 million dollars under the "Seva Nidhi" package which is not subject to

Income Tax upon completion of service. 30% of each recruit's monthly pay will go towards Seva Nidhi, with the government matching that amount. Twenty-five percent of these new recruits will be re-enlisted and will all serve for fifteen years in the enlisted ranks. Under this plan, employees will not be eligible for pension or bonus payments. On the bright side, they'll get 48 lakh in non-contributory life insurance coverage while they're on the clock.

Planned expenses provide for the possibility of a worker's death or permanent disability as a result of an accident while on the job. It is to say that it's like this. Above and beyond the over 1 crore that will be granted as part of the "Seva Nidhi" package in the event of death during service, full salary for the unseved time will be given. A similar 44 lakh, calculated depending on the percentage of disability, plus full pay for the unserved time, including "Seva Nidhi," plus interest as appropriate, must be granted in the event of disability owing to service. They may seek for regular military employment after serving for four years. They may be granted preference when applying for positions in other government agencies.

Eligibility Criteria

- 1) Candidates between 17-and-a-half years and 21 years will be eligible to apply.
- 2) Educational qualification for Agniveers will be Class 10th and 12th, the same as the criteria for regular positions in the force.
- 3) Recruitment will be carried out on an 'All India All Class' basis with medical and physical fitness standards following existing norms.

Agnipath Positives

The Raksha Mantri and the service chiefs have praised the programme, saying that it would have a "good influence on the human resource management of the armed forces." Many news conferences have been held where high-ranking officials have outlined the system's benefits. Including Agniveers would reduce the average age of the military by five to six years, bringing the average age of the army down from 32 to 26. Younger troops would be more physically capable of handling the demanding terrain around India's borders.

In addition, it is believed that the high turnover rate of Agniveers will provide the military with a steady supply of tech-savvy young adults. These people would have a higher tolerance for technological complexity, making them well-suited to operate the cutting-edge weapons systems now being introduced into the military. It is also planned to use the expertise found in established places of technical education.

The military may choose the most promising Agniveers for permanent duty by keeping just 25 percent of them and training them to become Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs). The calibre of the Indian military's noncommissioned officers (NCOs) is crucial because of the severe officer shortage plagues the force.

There has been radio silence from the administration and the military regarding the personnel savings resulting from the Agnipath project. The increasing cost of pensions and salaries has been a driving force behind implementing the plan to reduce the number of retired troops receiving pensions.

There is no denying that the 1.2 million-strong army needs reorganisation in the armed forces. While the military has had some conversations about rightsizing, not much has been done to implement those plans. There is no way of knowing whether government pressure for the Agnipath plan resulted from resistance to restructuring inside the military. However, one certain thing is that the allocation of salaries and benefits will be reduced gradually over time. The savings might be redirected to the military to upgrade equipment and introduce new technologies.

Moreover, the administration has portrayed this as an opportunity to strengthen the country. After serving for four years, "the Agniveers will be injected into the civil community where they may contribute tremendously towards the nation-building process," according to a news statement from the Ministry of Defense. Once widespread demonstrations against the programme emerged, the administration proposed several solutions, including employment reservations for ageing Agniveers. This may help ease young people's concerns about their futures in the workforce after serving in the military.

CRITICISMS AND CONTROVERSIES

Not everyone is on board with the plan. Several people, including veterans of the armed services, have voiced serious concerns after hearing about Agnipath (Shankar, 2022). Veterans like Lt. Generals KJ Singh, Jaishankar Menon, and Major Generals V K Madhok and Raj Mehta have spoken out against Agniveers. Timing, the programme's influence on the armed services' "ethos, values, beliefs, and combat effectiveness," and the social impact of demobilised Agniveers must be addressed. The administration has defended the proposal by saying it was only finalised after more than 250 sessions totaling 750 hours of debate between the services, the MoD, and other government institutions (PIB, 2022).

Like any other major change, Agnipath will have a rocky start. However, several of the voiced worries don't seem to be related to the prior attempts to improve colour service or the present state of affairs. One such false worry is that Agnipath may cause qualified individuals to seek employment in the private security industry rather than the military. Initial interest in the Agnipath posting suggests that interest among potential candidates has not waned. The Air Force got 749,899 registrations (or 250 for each job) in response to their new plan advertising 3,000 positions open for employment. This number is higher than any previous recruiting cycle. (Indian Air Force, 2022).

The criticisms and controversies around the Agnipath reform are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Aimed to Slash Government Bills

The government says the plan is about giving young people experience in the military, but insiders say it's all about reducing the three services' fast-growing wage and pension costs. The proposed defence budget for the 2020–2 fiscal year is \$5,25,166,000,000. Pensions for the armed forces came to a total of 1,19,696 crore. The revenue expenditure budget was Rs 2,33,000 crore, covering salary and rent.

No Pilot Testing

No testing of the plan through a pilot study has been initiated. Retired Lt. Gen. Vinod Bhatia criticised the programme and its implementation on Twitter. No testing, no proof of concept, just go right into full-scale execution of the "ToD" (Tour of Duty). Furthermore, society will become more militarised as roughly 40,000 young people (75%) return each year feeling rejected and hopeless since they lack a job and are only partially trained in weaponry. A bad plan indeed. 'No one wins,' he said on Twitter.

Compromise Normal Recruitment Process

Currently, the Army recruits young people under the short service commission for an initial tenure of 10 years, which is extendable up to 14 years. While as per the new scheme the soldiers will be inducted initially for four years and some of them would be retained. The government has packaged the scheme with a good catch salary scheme, tax exemption and allied benefits including non-contributory life insurance cover of Rs 48 lakh for their engagement period. However, there will be no entitlement to gratuity and pensionary benefits. Critics see red as the government claim that 'Agniveers' will be offered an opportunity to apply for permanent enrolment in the armed forces, but based on organisational requirement and policies promulgated by the armed forces from time-to-time. The reports indicate that 25 per cent of the recruits will be retained for regular service. Over these, critics also worry if the new scheme will compromise the normal recruitment process.

Insufficient Training Period

It takes 7-8 years to become a fully trained combat-ready soldier. Experts have also shared that four years are too little a time for a soldier to be heavily invested in his unit or to his fellow soldiers. Many veteran critics are concerned that a combat soldier cannot be trained in four years, and the scheme thus compromises national security. As Colonel Rathore agrees with these veterans,

“the idea of shortened training spell indirectly trivializes the skill-sets for which the armed forces diligently train their cadres. For instance, the Army alone has over 150 trades, which is peculiar. The tenure of a soldier or sailor or airman under the Agnipath scheme would be chock-a-block with activities. In his four-year tenure, the recruitment training, authorized leaves, and temporary duties would eat up to 90 weeks. Is it possible to groom a green soldier as a missile pilot, a tank and artillery gunner, a machine gunner, a vehicle driver, or even a scout who moves ahead of an infantry section in the remaining period and then loses him?”

Dilutes professionalism, military ethos & fighting spirit

It will hit the basic ethos of 'Naam, Namak and Nishaan' (reputation of battalion, fidelity & ensign/colours) for which soldiers fight. Opposition parties in the countries have also made comments in similar lines. According to Congress, decision could 'compromise' the efficiency and operational capability of the three services. Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala noted that the three armed forces have a special dignity, history, character and tradition of discipline, Surjewala asked whether the four-year contract recruits would adopt this tradition, convention, the spirit of attachment and discipline.

Saikat Datta, Strategic Advisor at think tank The Dialogue, said on Twitter:

"The Indian Army fights for 'paltan ki izzat'. For most civilians and/or those who haven't seen combat, if anyone expects a person on a four-year tour of duty to understand, let alone climb 18,000+ feet, under fire, and fight, then they are either delusional or ill-informed".

Training May Remain Unutilized

Forces will lose experienced soldiers. The jawans joining the Army, Navy and Air Force will be given technical training to support the ongoing operations. But these men and women will leave after four years, which could create a void. Experts have also voiced concerns that releasing 75 per cent of soldiers every four years could lead to a shortage of experienced personnel in the forces.

Lieutenant General (Retired) PR Shankar wrote in a blogpost,

"In essence, the tour of duty proposal expects a superman from a kindergarten. We might be producing an Abhimanyu but he will not leave the Chakravyuhu. After five years of tour of duty, Arjuns will not be available in our next Mahabharata. The cutting edge units will not be able to fight. There are no runners up in war."

Difficult to Find another Job

The 'Agnipath' scheme opens the way for recruiting 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. One of the concerns raised of the Agnipath scheme pertains to future career prospects of those demobilised eventually. Agniveers will be risk-averse, with the bulk looking for a second career. Our four years of service will mean other jobs will be out of reach after that, and Agniveers will be left behind by their peers.

The Centre, and certain state governments, have announced job reservations and other incentives for the demobilised Agniveers. For instance, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the MoD have announced 10-percent reservation in several of their organisations for Agniveers, which together have a cadre strength of over 19 lakh. This may not be adequate to absorb all the demobilised Agniveers, but the jobs reserved by state governments would provide reasonable scope for those needing a job after their military service.

Critics have dismissed the government's job reservations, arguing that previous reservations for ex-servicemen (ESMs) have remained grossly underutilised. Indeed, as of June 2021, against a total of over 32 lakh vacancies reserved for ESMs, only 80,135 (or 2.49 percent) posts have been filled. However, absorption of Agniveers can hardly be compared with the under-utilisation of the job quota by ESMs. The principal reason for ESMs not filling up posts reserved for them is their lack of interest, largely because of their late exit from the services and the availability of a guaranteed life-long pension, both of which would not be applicable in the case of Agniveers. With the vast segment of Agniveers exiting the military at a much younger age (between 21.5 and 25 years), they will have both age and motivation to seek a job in other sectors.

No Pension Benefit

Those hired under the 'Agnipath' scheme will be given a one-time lumpsum of 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.

Militarization of society

Critics argue that retrenching youth from the armed forces after four years will create security problems. Given the experience of retired soldiers at age 38, it is complicated to get absorbed into the paramilitary forces. In other civilian sectors, mostly retired armed forces personnel get jobs as guards in private security agencies. They cannot find respectable employment and depend on their pensions and other post-retirement benefits.

However, it has been argued that Agniveers who do not find a place in the regular cadre will leave the military dejected and could be a potential nuisance for society, given their exposure to the use of arms. In the case of Agniveers, so run the arguments, as they will be leaving the armed forces at a tender age of 21 to 25, they can, if unemployed, fall prey to the lure of crime syndicates, radical political outfits, and worse the foreign intelligence agencies. Trained in handling weapons and explosives and having the basic knowledge of military establishments functioning, such a person can be a real security threat. Some of the more enterprising ones could join the overseas mercenary groups and private military contractors (PMCs). After all, in Ukraine today, many PMCs are fighting for that country.

Hinting about the future of unemployed youth who has military training, Congress leader and Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said,

“This means teach the soldiers to use guns and leave them in the society. What do you want to do? If you are enlisting in the army then keep them till the age of 35 years. There is a fault in your intention. It is trying to mislead the youth.”

It may lead to militarization of society with around 35,000 combat-trained youth being jobless every year.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms 2022 represents a significant effort by the Indian government to strengthen the country's defense capabilities and foster a sense of national pride and unity among its citizens, particularly the youth. However, the success of this policy depends on various factors, including the effective implementation of its strategies, the availability of resources, and the youth's response to the call for national service. The Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms 2022 has been hailed by the Indian government and military leaders as transformational, and it is expected to positively impact the armed forces' human resource management. By inducting Agniveers, younger soldiers would be fitter and better able to operate in challenging terrain, and the military would benefit from a constant stream of technology-savvy youth. Only 25% of Agniveers would be retained for permanent service, allowing the military to pick the best candidates and groom them for Non-Commissioned Officers. The scheme is also expected to cut down on the number of soldiers who retire with pensions, reducing the salary and pension budget over time, which could be used towards modernization and technology upgradation. The government has framed the scheme as a nation-building exercise, with retiring Agniveers being offered reservations in government jobs.

The Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms 2022 has also been criticized for various reasons. One of the most significant criticisms is that the scheme slashes the government's bills, particularly the rising pay and pension budget, rather than strengthening the country's defense capabilities. This has raised concerns about the scheme's long-term impact on the military's effectiveness and morale. Another issue is that the scheme was not pilot tested, and there are concerns that its implementation may compromise the normal recruitment process. This could dilute the military's professionalism, ethos, and fighting spirit, which are essential for its operational effectiveness.

Additionally, the insufficient training period for Agniveers has raised concerns that their training may remain unutilized or underutilized, which could further compromise the military's effectiveness. Moreover, the scheme has been criticized for making it difficult for Agniveers to find another job after completing their four-year stint in the military. The lack of pension benefits for Agniveers has also raised concerns about their post-retirement financial security. This could lead to a significant disincentive for youth to join the military, particularly those who value financial security. Furthermore, some have criticized the scheme's potential to militarize society, as it could foster a culture of militarism and nationalism that may not be conducive to a pluralistic democracy. Concerns exist that this could lead to a dangerous polarization of society and a disregard for civil liberties and human rights.

In conclusion, the Agnipath Defense Policy Reforms 2022 represents a significant effort by the Indian government to strengthen the country's defense capabilities and foster a sense of national pride and unity among its citizens, particularly the youth. However, the success of this policy depends on various factors, including the effective implementation of its strategies, the availability of resources, and the youth's response to the call for national service.

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