

The Agnipath scheme for armed forces

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Why in news?

- In a “transformative” military recruitment reform, the Centre has announced the Agnipath scheme for recruitment of soldiers in the three branches of the armed forces, on a short-term basis.
- Under the scheme, youth between 17.5 to 21 years of age will be enrolled on an ‘**All-India All-Class**’ basis as **soldiers for four years**.
- These recruits, who will be known as ‘Agniveers’, will form a distinct rank bearing a distinct insignia in the respective forces. They will not be eligible for any pensionary benefit under the scheme.
- With this, the existing framework of employment for soldiers will cease to exist and those below officer rank will be recruited into the three services through the Agnipath scheme.
- The **scheme does not apply to defence officers** for whom there is a provision of short-term service called the Short Service Commission or SSC.

What are the features of the new scheme?

- Aimed at **reducing salaries and pensions to divert resources for military modernisation**, the idea of a short-term recruitment model or ‘Tour of Duty’ (ToD) was first mooted around two years back for the selection of officers and jawans, for a limited number of vacancies.

Eligibility and recruitment:

- As part of the Agnipath scheme, selected candidates will be enrolled under the respective Service Acts for four years. Those between the ages 17.5 and 21 years will be eligible to apply.
- Candidates below 18 years of age will have to get their enrolment forms signed by their parents or guardians. Medical and physical fitness standards will continue in accordance with existing norms for different categories and trades in the military.
- The required educational qualification will be Class 10-12, depending on the service and assigned role. For instance, the educational qualification required for entry into General Duty soldier is Class 10.
- In 2022, the Centre will recruit 46,000 Agniveers and the induction process will repeat every six months.

Training:

- Agniveers will undergo military training in existing training centres as per the requirements of the service they join and the role they are assigned.
- The training will go on for a maximum of six months, post which an Agniveer will be deployed for the remaining three and a half years.
- The trained Agniveers will be capable of being deployed on the borders with Pakistan and China.

Selection process:

- An online centralised system will be used for enrolment of Agniveers with specialised rallies, and campus interviews from technical institutes like industrial training institutes (ITIs).
- The selection will be the exclusive jurisdiction of the armed forces.

Year	Customised Package (Monthly)	In Hand (70%)	Contribution to Agniveers Corpus Fund (30%)	Contribution to Corpus fund by Gol
All Figures in Rs. (Monthly Contribution)				
1 st Year	30000	21000	9000	9000
2 nd Year	33000	23100	9900	9900
3 rd Year	36500	25550	10950	10950
4 th Year	40000	28000	12000	12000
All Figures in Rs. (Monthly Contribution)				
Total Contribution in Agniveers Corpus Fund after four years			Rs. 5.02 lakh	Rs. 5.02 lakh
Exit after 4 year		Rs. 10.04 Lakhs as Seve Nidhi Package (absolute amount excluding interest)		

Permanent enrolment:

- After four years of service are completed, Agniveers will be eligible to apply for permanent enrolment in the armed forces.
- Up to 25% of them will be selected on an objective basis and enrolled as regular cadre. They will have to serve for a further minimum of 15 years and their salary will be revised to that of a regular soldier.
- For these selected soldiers, existing terms of the service of Junior Commissioned Officers/Other Ranks (OR) in the Army and their equivalent in the other two forces will apply.
- **Adequate re-employment opportunities will be created for the rest 75%** who will move out of the services and return to society.
- States such as Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh have announced that Agniveers will be given preference in police recruitments.

What benefits will be extended to Agniveers?

Salary:

- In the first year of enrolment under the Agnipath scheme, an Agniveer will get a monthly salary of ₹30,000, which translates to an annual package of ₹4.76 lakh.
- The in-hand amount is estimated around ₹21,000. The remaining ₹9,000 will go to a corpus with an equal contribution from the government. In the second and third year of their service, an Agniveer will get ₹33,000 and ₹36,500 per month, respectively and ₹40,000 in the final year.
- In addition to monthly salary, these recruits will be paid allowances for travel and uniform. They will also be entitled to honours, and awards as per existing guidelines.

Seva Nidhi:

- There will, however, be **no pension or gratuity benefits for these recruits**. Agniveers will contribute 30% of their salaries to a package called ‘Seva Nidhi’, and this amount will be matched by the government.
- This fund will accrue interest, and at the end of the four years, each soldier will get ₹11.71 lakh as a lump sum tax-free amount, which includes interest accumulated on the absolute amount of ₹10.04 lakh.
- During service, an Agniveer will be entitled to avail medical facilities at service hospitals, along with canteen facilities. An Agniveer will be granted 30-day annual leave while sick leave will be based on medical advice.

Life Insurance:

- The Agniveers will also be provided non-contributory life insurance cover of ₹48 lakh during their service in the armed forces.

In case of death/disability:

- **In case of death during service**, the next of kin of the deceased Agniveer will get insurance money, one-time ex gratia payment of ₹44 lakh, full pay for the unserved period along with the balance amount in the soldier’s Seva Nidhi fund and government contribution and interest accrued in the Agniveer Corpus Fund which amounts to over ₹1 crore.
- **In case an Agniveer suffers a disability attributable or aggravated** due to conditions of engagement, a provision of up to ₹44 lakh based on the percentage of disability, apart from full pay for the unserved period will be given. The soldier will also be given the balance amount in the Seva Nidhi fund and the Centre’s contribution from the Agniveer Corpus Fund.

Skill certificate:

- In addition, Agniveers will get skill certificates, awards of credits so that they can study further, and a financial package to support future endeavours after their short-term military service.

Can an Agniveer leave service at any time?

- No. An Agniveer will not be permitted to leave the service before completing the engagement period except in exceptional cases, with approval of the Competent Authority.

Concerns over Agnipath scheme:

Impact on the capabilities of the defence services:

- Several defence experts, have raised concern over the Agnipath model and the future of Agniveers, asking the Government to fix gaps, which could have an **adverse impact on the capabilities of the defence services**.
- They point out that the reform is primarily being introduced to slash the growing salary and pension bills of the three services. Safeguarding national security should be of paramount importance for the Government.

Militarization of society:

- It will also lead to Militarization of society, nearly 40,000(75%) youth year on year back rejected & dejected without a job, semi trained in arms ex Agniveers.

Employability of the 75%:

- Concerns have also been raised about the employability of the 75% who will return to the civil world after serving for four years in the armed forces.
- However, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs announced that the youth recruited under the Agnipath scheme will get priority in recruitment to the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and Assam Rifles.