

NATIONAL SERVICE SCHEME AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH TO CONTRIBUTE IN NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

The overall aim of National Service Scheme as envisaged earlier, is to give an extension dimension to the higher education system and orient the student youth to community service while they are studying in educational institutions. The concept of making national service a part of university education took about 20 years to evolve from the state of an idea into that of a scheme. The early seeds of it were sown by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan in his Report (1948). National Service Scheme (NSS) was introduced in 1969 with the primary objective of developing the personality and character of the student youth through voluntary community service. Initially it was launched in 37 Universities involving about 40,000 volunteers. However, with the passage of time and as a Pan Indian programme, the number of educational institutions covered under NSS has been increasing year after year. The importance of NSS was underlined in an Evaluation Study conducted through Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). In their Study Report, TISS concluded that NSS has been a well-intentioned and an ideologically motivated scheme of the Government of India and that NSS is one of the greatest experiments in the field of youth work in the world. This paper also highlights the constraints faced by the NSS, and students in the system and also suggests measure to overcome in order to utilize future generation in positive direction.

Keywords: *National Service Scheme, Youth, Nation Building*

The overall aim of National Service Scheme as envisaged earlier, is to give an extension dimension to the higher education system and orient the student youth to community service while they are studying in educational institutions. The reason for the formulation of this objective is the general realization that the students in the +2 level and above have a tendency to get alienated from the village/slum masses that constitute the majority of the population of the country. The educated youth who are expected to take the reins of administration in future are found to be unaware of the problems of the community and in certain cases are indifferent towards their needs and problems. Therefore it is necessary to arouse the social conscience of the students, and to provide them an opportunity to work with the people in the villages and slums. It is felt that their interaction with the common villagers and slum-dwellers will expose them to the realities of life, and bring about a change in their social perception.

Youth for Nation Building

National Service Scheme (NSS) was introduced in 1969 with the primary objective of developing the personality and character of the student youth through voluntary community service. Initially it was launched in 37 Universities involving about 40,000 volunteers. However, with the passage of time and as a Pan Indian programme, the number of educational institutions covered under NSS has been increasing year after year. Currently more than 36.5 lakh volunteers are enrolled in 39,695 NSS units spread over 391 Universities/ +2 Councils, 16,278 Colleges and Technical Institutions and 12,483 Senior Secondary Schools. Since its inception, over 4.78 crore students have benefited from NSS.

Each NSS volunteer is required to put in minimum 120 hours of service per year for two years, i.e., total 240 hours. This work is undertaken in villages/ slums adopted by NSS unit or in school/ college campuses. usually after study hours or during weekends/ vacations. Besides, Each NSS unit organises a Special Camp of 7 days' duration in adopted villages or urban slums during vacations, with some specific projects, by involving the local communities. Each volunteer is required to participate in the Special Camp once during the 2-year period. Thus, about 50 percent of the NSS volunteers in a Unit participate in a particular Special Camp.

NSS units can take up any activity that has relevant to the community. The activities continue to evolve in response to the needs of the community. The core activities could be in the field of education and literacy, health, family welfare and nutrition, sanitation and cleanliness, environment conservation, social service programmes, programmes for improving status of women, production-oriented programmes, disaster relief and rehabilitation, campaigning against social evils, creating awareness about Flagship Programmes of the Government like Digital India, Skill India, Promotion of Yoga etc.

NSS is a Central government programme. yet the Central government, the States/UTs and the Educational Institutions are the 3 pillars of this Programme. It would have been impossible to effectively run a programme directly from the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, dealing with over 29,000 educational institutions across the country. The implementation of the programme has been possible due to effective collaboration/ partnership between the Centre and the States on the one hand and the States and Educational Institutions on the other.

As mentioned earlier, NSS was introduced with the primary objective of developing the personality and character of the student youth through *voluntary community service*. 'Education through Service' is the purpose of the NSS. The ideological orientation of the NSS is inspired by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. Very appropriately, the motto of NSS is "NOT ME, BUT YOU". An NSS volunteer places the 'community' before 'self'. This is part of the *third dimension of education*, namely, *value education*, which is becoming increasingly important.

NSS volunteers have been making very valuable contribution to the Society, besides developing their own personality. During the previous year, NSS units organised 12,628 special camps in adopted villages/ slums across the country. NSS volunteers undertook 91 lakh volunteer-hours of Shramadaan, donated 1.98 lakh units of blood and planted over 13.27 lakh saplings. The volunteers were instrumental in organising about 7,051 Health, Eye and Immunization camps and also 30,011 awareness programmes through rallies and campaigns on various important government programmes and social issues. NSS volunteers facilitated pulse polio immunization of about 6 lakh children. The volunteers have been playing key role in Swachh Bharat Mission, spreading digital literacy and in popularization of Yoga. On the occasion of International Day of Yoga last year, about 11.19 lakh NSS volunteers participated in yoga programmes across the country.

Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports is committed to expand NSS in a big way. So far, the NSS covers less than 10% of the students eligible to join it. Efforts are being made to increase funding support for NSS and meanwhile, setting up of Self-Financing Units of NSS has also been permitted. To encourage students to take up

NSS, UGC has issued an Advisory to all Universities to introduce NSS as an Elective subject with credits. The Ministry has been rewarding good work done by NSS volunteers by conferring Annual NSS Awards at national level, by providing opportunities to NSS volunteers to participate in Republic Day Parade, International Youth Delegations, Adventure Camps, etc.

While a lot of good work is being done under NSS, there is potential to do much more. The students and NSS volunteers are young Indians and they represent the most dynamic and vibrant section of the Society. These are exciting times in India. The Government of India, under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has embarked on the mission of building a united, strong and modern India – “*Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat*”, following the principle of “*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*”. A number of path-breaking initiatives have been taken. ‘Make in India’ campaign has been launched to develop India as a global manufacturing hub. ‘Digital India’ initiative seeks to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. A nation-wide campaign to promote Digital Payments is underway. ‘Skill India’ has been launched to impart necessary skills to prepare Indians for the opportunities in Indian economy as also the opportunities abroad.

A number of initiatives, including Smart Cities Project, have been launched for developing infrastructure. ‘Swachh Bharat Mission’ and ‘Clean Ganga’ Mission have been launched for building a clean and green India. A sustained and determined campaign is underway to eliminate the black money and to clean up our Society. NSS volunteers can be contributors as well as beneficiaries of these initiatives. The programme design of NSS needs to constantly evolve to reflect the priorities of the Government and the nation.

The importance of NSS was underlined in an Evaluation Study conducted through Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). In their Study Report, TISS concluded that NSS has been a well-intentioned and an ideologically motivated scheme of the Government of India and that NSS is one of the greatest experiments in the field of youth work in the world. In fact, TISS recommended that NSS should be made mandatory for all public and private funded universities, colleges and institutions and should be integrated as part of the curriculum.

Volunteer/ Personal benefits

Build self-knowledge as the basis of leadership to facilitate others through change; Strengthen communication skills which are key to making an effective case for change; Learn the theory and principles behind citizen-led and asset-based approaches and how to integrate these into your work; Develop facilitation skills and tools to use in various community development situations; Strengthen competencies to analyze how different world views influence development and social change; Develop values and attitudes that nurture a culture of peace and non-violence; Engage in an analysis of the inter-sectional ties between power, poverty, health, caste, gender equality and environmental sustainability; Gain a greater understanding of the complexities and principals involved with multi-sector and multiple-actor collaboration and working in partnerships; Explore local efforts to create, maintain, and strengthen citizen-led and community-driven development and grassroots campaigns for policy change; Become connected with a growing network of peers from around the world working for development and social change; All volunteers shall work under the guidance of a

group leader nominated by the NSS Programme Officer; They shall make themselves worthy of the confidence and co-operation of the group community leadership They shall scrupulously avoid entering into any controversial issue.

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