



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
Only IAS Academy by Grandson of "Perunthalaivar Kamarajar"

Agnipath Scheme: Proposed Increase in Agniveer Retention and the Future of India's Military Reforms

Published On: 08-07-2026

Recent Developments:

- The **first batch of Agniveers**, recruited under the **Agnipath Scheme** in **2023**, will complete their four-year tenure later in **2026**.
- The **Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force** are internally examining proposals to **increase the retention percentage** of Agniveers beyond the existing **25% ceiling**, based on operational experience and future force requirements.
- Reportedly, the **Indian Navy** is considering retention of nearly **75%**, while the **Indian Army and Indian Air Force** are evaluating retention of around **50%**. The proposals are expected to be examined by the **Department of Military Affairs (DMA)** before any policy decision is taken.

Agnipath Scheme:

Overview:

- The **Agnipath Scheme** is a **short-term military recruitment model**, launched in **2022**, for recruitment of **Personnel Below Officer Rank (PBOR)** in the **Indian Armed Forces**.
- Selected candidates, known as **Agniveers**, are recruited between **17.5 and 23 years** of age and serve for **4 years**, including nearly **6 months of military training**.
- The scheme seeks to create a **younger, technologically adaptable and future-ready military**, while reducing the long-term pension burden on the defence budget.
- The scheme follows the "**All India, All Class**" recruitment model instead of traditional region or caste-based recruitment patterns.

Objectives:

- To reduce the **average age** of the Armed Forces from nearly **32 years** to around **26 years**.
- To create a **lean, agile and technology-oriented force** capable of operating modern defence platforms.
- To improve the long-term sustainability of defence expenditure by lowering pension liabilities.
- To provide disciplined, skilled and trained youth who can contribute to national development after military service.

Key Features of the Scheme:

Service Conditions:

- Agniveers serve for **4 years**, after which only **25%** are eligible for permanent enrolment based on **merit, organisational requirements and willingness to continue**.
- The remaining **75%** are released with a **tax-free Seva Nidhi Package** of approximately **₹11.71 lakh**, but are **not entitled to pension**.

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

- Agniveers receive **salary, allowances, risk and hardship allowances, leave and welfare benefits** comparable to regular personnel during their period of service.
- They are provided **life insurance cover**, disability compensation and death benefits during service under prescribed rules.

Post-Service Opportunities:

- The **Ministry of Home Affairs** has reserved **10% vacancies** in the **Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)** and the **Assam Rifles** for eligible former Agniveers.
- The **Ministry of Defence** provides **10% reservation** in recruitment to the **Indian Coast Guard** and all **Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs)**.
- The **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways** has introduced initiatives to facilitate the induction of former Agniveers into the **merchant navy**.
- Several banks and institutions have signed **MoUs** to facilitate financial security, credit support and employment opportunities for former Agniveers.

Present Retention Framework:

Existing Policy:

- Up to **25%** of each batch may be permanently enrolled into the regular cadre after completion of four years.
- All Agniveers are formally released at the end of their tenure before selected candidates are re-enrolled as regular soldiers, sailors or airmen.
- Selection is based on **performance, organisational requirements and prescribed evaluation criteria**.

Proposal to Increase Retention:

Likely Changes Under Consideration:

- The **Indian Navy** is reportedly examining retention of nearly **75%** of Agniveers.
- The **Indian Army** and **Indian Air Force** are considering increasing retention to nearly **50%**.
- Earlier proposals seeking similar changes were returned for further evaluation, and fresh discussions are now underway within the **Department of Military Affairs**.

Why Higher Retention is Being Considered:

Operational Experience:

- Four years of military service provides Agniveers with valuable operational exposure, specialised training and familiarity with advanced weapon systems.
- Retaining a larger proportion of trained personnel would strengthen operational readiness during emergencies and conflicts.

Lessons from Operation Sindoor:

- Operational assessments reportedly indicated that Agniveers performed effectively during **Operation Sindoor**.
- Personnel with longer service experience demonstrated quicker battlefield decision-making, stronger tactical judgement and better responses because of repeated operational deployments and extensive training.

Technological Modernisation:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthy Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

- The Armed Forces are increasingly inducting **network-centric systems, precision weapons, advanced aircraft, warships, drones and emerging defence technologies**.
- Sophisticated platforms require longer training periods and sustained technical expertise, particularly in the **Navy and Air Force**.
- Higher retention would preserve institutional knowledge and reduce repeated training costs.

Addressing Manpower Gaps:

- The **Indian Army** currently faces a shortage of nearly **1.8 lakh personnel**.
- Around **70,000 Agniveers** completed training during the previous cycle, while nearly **90,000 vacancies** are expected in the upcoming recruitment cycle.
- Greater retention would help bridge manpower shortages until recruitment stabilises.

Improved Unit Cohesion:

- Longer service enhances **team cohesion, leadership development, discipline and institutional memory**.
- Experienced personnel improve operational efficiency and mentoring within military units.

Alternative Model Under Examination:

Differential Retention Across Units:

- Even if the overall retention limit remains **25%**, specialised formations may retain a larger proportion of experienced Agniveers.
- Technically intensive and specialised units could maintain higher retention, while conventional infantry formations may continue with larger numbers of short-term Agniveers.
- Newly raised **Bhairav Battalions** have been discussed as a possible example of such differentiated manpower management.

Significance for Defence Reforms:

Strategic Importance:

- The debate reflects the need to balance a **young military profile** with adequate availability of **experienced and technically skilled personnel**.
- The decision will influence India's **long-term military manpower policy, combat preparedness, force modernisation and defence reforms**.
- The review also demonstrates the **adaptive nature of defence reforms**, where policy modifications are guided by operational experience rather than fixed assumptions.

Challenges Associated with the Scheme:

Key Concerns:

- A short service period may be inadequate for mastering highly sophisticated defence technologies.
- Lower retention could reduce institutional continuity in specialised branches.
- The absence of pension benefits remains a concern for some stakeholders.
- Smooth post-service rehabilitation and employment remain critical for the long-term success of the scheme.

Way Forward:

Policy Priorities:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthy Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

- Retention levels should be determined through evidence-based assessment of operational performance and technological requirements.
- Technical branches may require differentiated retention policies based on training investment and skill intensity.
- Stronger coordination with **State Governments, CAPFs, public sector organisations** and the private sector can improve post-service employment opportunities.
- Periodic review mechanisms should ensure that the scheme evolves in accordance with India's changing security environment and military modernisation.

Conclusion:

Evolutionary Defence Reform:

- Former Army Chief **Upendra Dwivedi** described the **Agnipath Scheme** as a transformative human resource reform aimed at creating a younger, technologically capable and future-ready military.
- He emphasised that future refinements should be guided by **operational experience, institutional assessment and evidence emerging after completion of the first full recruitment cycle**, rather than predetermined numerical targets