



Nation Building through the Volunteerism and Community Services of National Service Scheme (NSS): An Extension Dimension of Higher Education

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Abstract— *The National Service Scheme, also known as NSS, is a social development activity with the motto "NOT ME, BUT YOU." The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, conducts the National Service Scheme (NSS), an extension service programme. The program extends from the senior secondary school stage to the postgraduate level across all Indian universities. The program's two main components are youth and community. The youth are the future citizens and administrators of India. Participating in NSS, the candidates perceive social change, transformations, and social development issues. The youth are the most vibrant generation, with energy, courage, and the ability to change society. The study examines the main objective of the NSS program for the overall development of student youth through their participation in social and nation-building activities, as well as education. This study examines the importance of NSS in keeping students motivated to attend higher educational institutions. NSS plays a catalytic role in motivating students to take initiative in resolving different problems, social barriers, harassment, and violence, transforming all the negative activities into positive ones, and creating a peaceful atmosphere on campuses as well as in neighbouring areas.*

Keywords— *National Service Scheme (NSS), extension service programme, higher education, community development, nation-building, volunteerism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The National Service Scheme (NSS) is one of the leading youth and community development programmes in India. The National Service Scheme (NSS) is an important scheme of the Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, New Delhi. As a scheme, NSS was launched. NSS is a voluntary association of youth in colleges, universities, and at the senior secondary level to take part in various government-led community service activities and programmes from time to time. Launched in 1969, NSS encompasses 37 universities and engages approximately 40,000 volunteers. At present, almost 43 lakh volunteers are on the rolls, including about 11,809 schools, 15,908 colleges and technical institutions, and 336 universities. More than 4.25 crore students have benefited from NSS

since its inception. As responsible citizens of India, students contribute their services by adhering to socially acceptable behaviours and taking morally correct actions towards society, all of which must be ethically and morally right. One of the NSS's important objectives is to follow some of the responsibilities to build up a developed society with a comprehensive plan to inculcate in societal development a wise, positive, confident, self-respecting, and hardworking spirit. The National Service Scheme (NSS) plays a crucial role in shaping the minds of these students. When students enter the higher education system at the age of 16, they begin to understand various social issues and needs, as well as social responsibility, social services, national integration, patriotism, and communalism, all of which contribute to the betterment of society through their NSS volunteer work. This principle allows them to promote this attitude

throughout their lives for the wellbeing of society. The NSS scheme provides youth with hands-on training in rendering community service without bias to improve their living standards and lead a life of dignity (NSS Manual, 2006).

NSS – A Systematic Process of Education and Social Services

Understanding the issues related to youth and social development, the Government of India introduced the concept of the National Service Scheme (NSS) for social and youth development in 1969, coinciding with the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi. NSS volunteers engage in activities in rural adoptive villages, urban slums, and institutions, focusing on social and health issues, environmental awareness, natural disasters, relief work, the eradication of social evils, fostering communal harmony, and other development issues. Education is said to be a learning process that leads to harmonious development, including physical, mental, moral, spiritual, and social phenomena. The primary objective of education is to understand society and identify strategies for its improvement, and it plays a crucial role in addressing various societal issues. True education is a systematic process by which a student can acquire knowledge, experience, skills, and attitudes towards social services. It makes an individual civilized, cultured, and perfect. All higher educational institutions need to adapt and introduce social service programmes for the economically weaker underprivileged sections in rural and urban slum areas that will make education more acceptable and socially relevant to the population of the underdeveloped areas. As per the policy framework, UGC (1977) considered continuing education as the third important dimension of higher education and stressed that universities should adopt the concept of continuing education culture and make an effort to allocate 25 percent of their time for off-campus continuing educational activities through community education.

The National Service Scheme (NSS) aims to allow young students to prepare for community service while also pursuing higher education. After completing their education, youth usually wish to take up administrative or other jobs that require them to be aware of the problems of the community. NSS focuses on understanding students' social conscience and gives them the opportunity to work with people in rural villages and urban slums. It is believed that interaction with ordinary village and slum dwellers exposes them to the realities of life and brings about a change in their social perception.

II. ROLE OF NSS IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

All educational institutions are responsible for carrying out development activities for their society. Continuing education programmes express this accountability and commitment by allowing educated individuals to participate in social services alongside their education. Generally, the National Service Scheme is a platform to awaken the social consciousness of students and provide them with an opportunity to work creatively and constructively with people around the educational institution. Research reveals that the programme fosters the development of students' personalities and ignites their inclination towards social service, thereby enhancing their physical and mental well-being. Students are able to understand themselves in relation to the community's needs and problems and find solutions. Volunteerism through NSS is the learning process to develop the competencies needed to live together, share responsibilities in a group, acquire skills to promote community participation, develop leadership skills, develop democratic attitudes, and enhance the ability to deal with emergencies and natural disasters. (Mehta, 1971; Matin, 1995; Stukas et al., 1998; Youniss & Yates, 1999).

Imparting Quality Education and Community Services through NSS

Teaching and learning in higher education are necessary to acquire knowledge and gain experience through learning, and these are the fundamental principles for designing quality education. Education is essential for the development of individuals and communities, enabling them to realise their creative potential, express their talents, take responsibility, enhance their leadership quality, and contribute to self-development, social upliftment, and nation-building.

Various studies reveal that after 75 years of independence for India, about 90% of students remain outside the periphery of higher education in underdeveloped rural areas. After completing their secondary school education, they lose interest in entering higher education. This trend is particularly prevalent among SC, ST, OBC, and minority communities, indicating that minimal education marginalizes them, but education without social relevance is meaningless. Bringing students into the arena of higher education is a challenge. Once admitted to college, it is our responsibility to engage them in a variety of educational, life-skill, fun, and value-added programs. In India, young people aged 15–29 years constitute 27.5% of the population. The Government of India currently invests over 90,000 crores per year, or approximately 2,710 rupees per youth per year, in youth development programmes through youth-focused higher education, skill development, healthcare, etc. (NYP, 2014).

Challenges

The challenges faced by higher education include a low percentage of GER (gross enrolment ratio), a shortage of skilled teachers, a sharp increase in dropout rates, student unrest on campus, political interference on campus, poor infrastructure facilities, frequent changes in curriculum and patterns, repetitive exam patterns, and a lack of activities to foster youth development. Some of the emerging social issues frequently bother students, imposing a significant burden on them. Our education system is not interacting effectively with the environment, posing a grave threat to our social lives. The Kothari Committee (1966–1966) strongly recommended that education should be a constructive link between educational institutions and the community, emphasizing that present students would be the future citizens and politicians of our country. Therefore, they should be acquainted with the social structure and social wellbeing process before becoming administrative officials. The committee recommended that "forms of social and national service should be an integral part of education at all stages." It was also noted that this could be achieved by enabling students to participate in the following programmes: programmes on community education on school campuses and programmes on community development and national reconstruction (National Education Commission, 1964-1966). The NSS promotes quality improvement in higher education and provides opportunities for the holistic development of young people, including adolescents, to realize their full potential. It develops the youth's leadership skills and personalities and directs their energies towards socioeconomic development. The NSS provides positive suggestions and a conducive environment for all-round development. Implementation of various programs through NSS fosters the youth's sense of risk-taking capacity, nature of adventure, teamwork, ability to handle difficult situations, and perseverance. It develops values like democracy, socialism, and secularism, promotes national unity among the youth, fosters the spirit of national integration and unity in diversity, and inculcates a sense of social harmony in the youth. The NSS motivates the youth to act as focal points for spreading knowledge in rural areas and participating in the nation-building process. It promotes measures for the development and empowerment of the youth, particularly the economically and socially challenged backward sections of society.

Solution Through the Volunteerism of NSS

Many regular programs have already been implemented under NSS, and much more needs to be done. NSS volunteers are actively involved in various activities such as blood donation camps, tree planting programs, polio vaccination campaigns, rainwater harvesting activities, and

the preservation and cleaning of historical structures. Dedicated volunteers are involved in designing and renovating playgrounds, the construction of water tanks, parks, new drains, low-cost toilets, digging stocking holes, redesigning kacha streets and houses, cleaning hospital premises, drains, roads, water bodies, parks, temples, etc. Volunteers from the National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteer their selfless services to organise various health camps, environmental awareness camps, social awareness programmes, and women's awareness programmes, both on campus and through outreach programmes in neighbouring villages. Additionally, they organize events such as blood donation camps, national integration camps, youth motivation camps, self-defence programmes, child labour protection camps, nature camps, and digital literacy drives. NSS volunteers have also performed very effectively and commendably during the COVID-19 lockdown situation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, NSS volunteers delivered grocery items, cooked food, medicines, oxygen cylinders, fuel, and all other necessary items directly to people's doorsteps even during the lockdown, putting their lives at risk. About 4,500 student volunteers are young Indians, representing the most dynamic and influential sections of society, and they are working towards the 'Digital India' initiative, which aims to transform India into a digitalized society and knowledge economy. The Skill & Smart City project was launched to develop infrastructure. The Swachh Bharat Mission and Clean Ganga Mission, Clean India, were launched to build a clean and green India. The FIT India Movement programme in our country was launched and implemented through NSS to incorporate fitness into our lifestyle. Today, lifestyle diseases are on the rise in India, affecting even the youth, and cases of diabetes and hypertension are rising and are even more common among children in India. Little lifestyle changing practices can prevent these diseases and help people live healthy and prosperous lives.

The National Service Volunteer Scheme, also known as the NSS, offers exceptional youth development programs such as the Youth Leadership and Personality Development Camp, the National Integration Camp, the Inter-State Youth Exchange Programme, Multi-Cultural Activities, the National Youth Festival, the State Youth Festival, the National Youth Awards, the Promotion of Adventure at the Basic and Intermediate Level in India, the Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Awards, Life Skills Education, Counselling, Career Guidance, Residential Camps, Environment Building, Research & Studies on Youth Issues, Documentation & Publication, Seminars, Conferences, Exhibitions and Workshops on Youth or Adolescent Issues, National Integration and Adventure.

The NSS units in higher education institutions have demonstrated excellent work in several instances, earning the respect and confidence of the public. The special camping programmes are organised under the themes of generally addressing various developmental issues of national importance, like youth against famine, youth against dirt and disease, watershed management, and waste land development. Youth for Rural Reconstruction, Youth for Eco-Development, Youth for Mass Literacy, Youth for National Integration and Social Harmony, Youth for Social Development, Swachh Bharat, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Meri Mitti Mera Desh, Mission LIFE, etc. Every year, 50 percent of the volunteers of each NSS unit are expected to participate in special camps, which last seven days. The NSS programme has expanded both quantitatively and qualitatively over the years. The Government of India constituted a review committee in August 1984. The committee highly praised NSS, and one of its key recommendations was that the NSS programme had great potential and therefore should be continued and expanded. The committee also suggested increasing the number of students covered by NSS by 10% annually (NSS Manual, 2006). NSS volunteers can both contribute to and benefit from these initiatives. The NSS program must constantly evolve to reflect the priorities of the government and the nation.

An evaluation study report by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) highlighted the importance of NSS, stating that it is a goodwill and ideologically motivated programme of the Government of India and one of the world's largest experiments in youth engagement. The values are to promote self-development among the youth while conveying a commitment to community work. The programme has proven successful in places and institutions where leadership and individuals are committed to the common good. In fact, TISS has recommended that all public and private universities, colleges, and educational institutions make NSS compulsory and integrate it into their curriculum. (TISS, 2008-2009).

III. CONCLUSION

The National Service Scheme (NSS) programme incorporates the idea of volunteerism, motivating the youth to share their knowledge, skill development to meet the needs of the modern job world, enhancement of leadership qualities, selfless service to the community for their self-development, as well as nation-building. For more than 50 years, NSS has successfully continued its work in the field of youth development. During this time, thousands of volunteers have shaped their lives through NSS in colleges and universities. The number of NSS units and NSS

volunteers is increasing in India to build a new India where the nation is physically, mentally, culturally, digitally, skillfully, technologically developed, strong, and rich in character. Therefore, students should join NSS to make India vibrant and prosperous.

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