Chapter Four

NATIONAL SERVICE SCHEME
EVOLUTION AND BASIC CONCEPTS

Abstract

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). The Central Advisory Board of Education discussed the idea and made some recommendations in 1950. In the first Five Year Plan document (1951) the need for social service camps found a mention. During the next few years some institutions already started organizing such camps. Then in 1958, Pandit Nehru, Prime Minister, wrote to Chief Ministers suggesting social service as prerequisite for graduation. In 1959 an outline proposal came up for discussion in the meeting of education ministers from all over India. The concept was accepted, and Deshmukh Committee was formed to propose concrete suggestions (1959). In 1960 further suggestions came from Prof. K.G. Saiyidain and these are responsible, more or less, for the scheme as we have it now. But implementation was further delayed. Then came Dr. Kothari’s strong recommendations in 1966. During the next year Vice Chancellors’ Meeting took place and in 1969 a conference of student leaders welcomed the scheme. By that time the Fourth Five Year Plan was ready to be launched. It carried an outlay of five crore rupees for NSS. The scheme was launched on September 24, in the Gandhi Centenary Year, 1969.

Having traced this history the present chapter reviews the basic concepts, broad organizational goals, motto and operational
objectives of NSS, and then narrows down to discuss village adoption. It is pointed out that NSS at present lacks clarity about the concept of village adoption and about the strategies to be used for its effective implementation. In the last paragraph it is also pointed out that, though NSS has a network of eighteen training institutions all over the country, training is the weakest link in the chain.

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Introduction

The socialization factors responsible for the personal development of children are very many. Family up-bringing, system of education, availability of opportunities for healthy use of leisure time, opportunities for exhibiting hidden talents, peer group interaction, organized group living, support of a belief system, interaction with inspiring role-models, involvement in events/situations which may affect personal outlook, etc. are among them. It is not easy to socially engineer all these. But education, particularly its social content, plays a very significant role in this respect.

1.4.1.1 Social Content of Education

Social content of education – which is included directly or indirectly in the curriculum – consists of those messages which directly and indirectly communicate to the student some view of man and his relationship to his environment. This content is often seen in the goals and values articulated in formal documents such as political constitutions of countries, statements of policy, pronouncements of heads of governments, etc. In the Indian situation it may be said that we are pursuing the goal of a sustainably developed society characterized by a democratic, secular and socialist policy.

Education is an important means of socialization through which these values may be inculcated in our youth. For this the social content of education must provide a realistic assessment of the past and the present of our society, must identify its assets and liabilities and motivate the young to work towards the achievement of societal goals because they seem worthy in themselves. Educationists like M.S. Gore have pointed out that an activist orientation, creativity, ability to cope with change, personal
simplicity, and group commitment are some of the personality goals that should be strengthened through the content of education. Equally important are an achievement orientation and an acceptance of mobility and change.

1.4.1.2 Introduction of NSS in Our Universities

The pursuit of the social goals through the instrumentality of education seeking to inculcate the above mentioned and similar personality traits in students is what led to the introduction of NSS in Indian Universities. Mahatma Gandhi, in simple and direct terms, exhorted that students must always keep before them their social responsibility. Advising them to form a living contact with the community in whose midst their institution is located, he suggested that instead of undertaking academic research about economic and social disability, the students should do something positive so that the life of the villagers might be raised to a higher material and moral level. We have a whole history of such exhortations on the social commitment expected of students in colleges and universities. Some of these have already been referred to in Chapters One and Two.

1.4.2 History and Growth of NSS

1.4.2.1 The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948)

The early years of the post independence era in our country was marked by an urge for reinforcing the social content of education, both as a measure of educational reform and as a means to improve the quality of educated man-power. The University Education Commission headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan recommended introduction of national service in the academic institutions on a voluntary basis with a view to developing healthy
contacts between the students and teachers on the one hand, and establishing
a constructive linkage between the campus and the community on the other
hand.

1.4.2.2 Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) (1950)

The idea was again considered by the Central Advisory Board of
Education (CABE) at its meeting held in January 1950. After examining the
various aspects of the matter and in the light of the experiences of other
countries in this field, the Board recommended that students should devote
some time to manual work on a voluntary basis, and that the teachers should
also associate with them in such work. In the draft First Five Year Plan
adopted by the Government of India in 1952, the need for social and labour
service by students for one year was further stressed. Consequent upon this,
labour and social service camps, campus-work projects, village
apprenticeship scheme etc. were put into operation by various educational
institutions. In 1958, the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in
his letter to the Chief Ministers, mooted the idea of having social service as
a prerequisite for graduation. He further directed the Ministry of Education
to formulate a suitable scheme for introduction of national service into the
academic institutions.

1.4.2.3 Education Ministers’ Conference (1959)

In 1959, a draft outline of the scheme was placed before the
Education Ministers’ Conference. The Conference was unanimous about
the urgent need for trying out a workable scheme for national service. In
view of the fact that education as it was imparted in schools and colleges,
left something to be desired, it was felt necessary to supplement it with
programmes which would arouse interest in the social and economic reconstruction of the country. It was viewed that if the objectives of the scheme were to be realized, it was essential to integrate social service with the educational process as early as possible. The Conference suggested the appointment of a committee to work out details of the proposed pilot project.

1.4.2.4 C.D. Deshmukh’s Recommendations (1959)

In pursuance of these recommendations, a National Service Committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of Dr. C.D. Deshmukh on August 28, 1959, to make concrete suggestions in this direction. The committee recommended that national service for a period of nine months to a year might be made compulsory for all students completing high school education and intending to enroll themselves in a college or a university. The scheme was to include some military training, social service, manual labour and general education. The recommendations of the Committee could not be accepted because of its financial implications and difficulties in implementation.

1.4.2.5 K.G. Saiyidain’s Report (1960)

In 1960, at the instance of the Government of India, Prof. K.G. Saiyidain studied national service by students implemented in several countries of the world and submitted his report under the title “National Service for the Youth” to the Government with a number of recommendations as to what could be done in India to develop a feasible scheme of social service by students. It was recommended that national or social service should be introduced on a voluntary basis and extended as
widely as possible with a provision for rich and varied programmes of activities. It was also recommended that social service camps should be open to students as well as non-students within the prescribed age group for better interrelationship.

1.4.2.6 Kothari’s Recommendations (1966)

The Education Commission headed by Dr. D.S. Kothari (1964-66) recommended that students at all stages of education should be associated with some form of social service. This was taken into account by the State Education Ministers during their conference in April 1967 and they recommended that at the university level students could be permitted to join the National Cadet Corps (NCC) which was already in existence on a voluntary basis, and as an alternative to this could be offered a new programme called the National Service scheme (NSS). Promising sportsmen, however, should be exempted from both and allowed to join another scheme called the National Sports Organization (NSO), in view of the need to give priority to the development of sports and athletics.

1.4.2.7 Vice Chancellors’ Conference (1967)

The Vice-Chancellors’ Conference in September 1967 welcomed this recommendation and suggested that a special committee of Vice-Chancellors could be set up to examine this question in detail. In the statement of national policy on education of the Government of India, it was laid down that work experience and national service should be an integral part of education. In May, 1969, a conference of the students' representatives of the universities and institutions of higher learning convened by the Ministry of Education and the University Grants
Commission also unanimously declared that national service could be a powerful instrument for national integration. It could be used to introduce urban students to rural life. Projects for construction of permanent assets could also be undertaken as a symbol of the contribution of the student community to the progress and uplift of the nation.

1.4.2.8 National Service Scheme Launched (1969)

The details were soon worked out and the Planning Commission sanctioned an outlay of Rs.5 crores for National Service Scheme (NSS) during the Fourth Five Year Plan. It was stipulated that the NSS programme should be started as a pilot project in selected institutions and universities.

On September 24, 1969, the then Union Education Minister Dr. V.K.R.V. Rao, launched the NSS programme in 37 universities covering all States and simultaneously requested the Chief Ministers of States for their cooperation and help. It was appropriate that the programme was started during the Gandhi Centenary Year as it was Gandhi who inspired the Indian youth to participate in the movement for Indian independence and the social uplift of the downtrodden masses of our nation.

1.4.3 Special emphasis in National Policy on Education, 1986.
(Revised 1992)

The National Policy on Education 1986, with modification undertaken in 1992, envisaged that opportunities would be provided for the youth to involve themselves in national and social development through educational institutions and outside agencies. Students would be required to participate in one or the other of the existing schemes, namely, the National
Service Scheme or National Cadet Corps or National Sports Organization. It was also agreed that The National Service Volunteer Scheme (NSVS) would also be strengthened.

Other important recommendations are:

Academic credit for extension work could be considered and in certain areas directly related to extension activities like social work and rural development.

We strongly reiterate para 8.22 of NPE. Adequate facilities should be provided to ensure that all students participate in one or the other of the existing schemes, particularly National Service Scheme and National Cadet Corps.

In pursuance of the above recommendations, the Programme of Action (1992) on National Policy on Education provides that special incentives be evolved to encourage teachers' interest and participation, quite apart from incentives to encourage and sustain participation of students and youth in these programmes. It suggests that the possible incentives may include the following:

a) Recognition of the outstanding contribution of teachers to NSS as an extension work under the third dimension of the university system as equivalent to research work.

b) Special incentives for teachers for outstanding contributions under NSS.

c) Special incentives for students with outstanding records under NCC, NSS, etc. at the time of their admission to college and university and also for promotion within colleges and universities.

1.4.4 Basic Concepts of NSS

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 who 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.

1.4.4.1 Broad Objectives

The broad objectives of NSS are to:

(i) understand the community in which the volunteers work;
(ii) understand themselves in relation to their community;
(iii) identify the needs and problems of the community and involve them in problem solving processes;
(iv) develop in them a sense of social and civic responsibility;
(v) utilize their knowledge in finding practical solution to individual and community problems;
(vi) develop competence required for group-living and sharing of responsibilities;
(vii) gain skills in mobilizing community participation;
(viii) acquire leadership qualities and democratic attitude;
(ix) develop capacity to meet emergencies and natural disasters and;
(x) practice national integration and social harmony.
1.4.4.2 Programme Planning in NSS

Govt. of India has given detailed guidelines on programme planning and management of NSS. Participation and partnership are its hallmarks. To what extent these are being practiced is a matter of doubt.

1.4.4.3 The Motto

The motto or watchword of the National Service Scheme is ‘NOT ME BUT YOU’. This reflects the essence of democratic living and upholds the need for selfless service and appreciation of the other person’s point of view, and also to show consideration for fellow human beings. It underlines the fact that the welfare of an individual is ultimately dependent on the welfare of society as the whole. Therefore, it should be the aim of the NSS to demonstrate this motto in its day-to-day activities.

1.4.4.4 NSS Symbol

The symbol of the National Service Scheme is based on the ‘Rath’ wheel of the Konark Sun Temple situated in Orissa. These giant wheels of the Sun Temple portray the cycle of creation, preservation and release, and signify the movement of life across time and space. The design of the NSS symbol, which is a simplified form of the Sun-chariot wheel, primarily depicts movement. The wheel signifies the progressive cycle of life. It stands for continuity as well as change, and implies the continuous striving of NSS for social transformation and uplift.
1.4.4.5 Operational Objectives

The operational aim of NSS is to develop a sense of participation, service and achievement among the volunteers. The activities should aim at the following:

(i) making education more relevant to the present situation to meet the felt needs of the community, and supplement the education of the university/college students by bringing them face to face with the rural situation;

(ii) providing opportunities to the students to play their role in planning and executing development projects, which would not only help in creating durable community assets in rural areas and urban slums, but also result in the improvement of quality of life of the economically and socially weaker sections of the community;

(iii) encouraging students and non-students to work together along with the adults in rural areas;

(iv) developing qualities of leadership by discovering the latent potential among the campers, both students as well as local youth (rural and urban), with a view to involving them more intimately in the development programme, and also to ensure proper maintenance of the assets created during the camps;

(v) emphasizing dignity of labour and self-help and the need for combining physical work with intellectual pursuits;

(vi) encouraging youth to participate enthusiastically in the process of national development, and to promote national integration, through corporate living and cooperative action.
1.4.4.6 Village Adoption by NSS

As per NSS Manual (Govt. of India) village adoption is a programme of crucial significance in National Service Scheme. “A volunteer is expected to remain in constant touch with the community. Hence, it is of vital importance that a particular village/slum is selected for implementation of NSS programme... The volunteer is to live with the members of community and learn from their experience during his/her tenure in NSS.”

Though the Manual makes this assertion, it fails to indicate the relevant strategies and methodologies for village adoption. For example, it makes the following statements. (Italics given by researcher.)

- “The programme officers should use their discretion and should identify the projects which can be completed by seeking assistance from the community /other agencies.”
- “...the aim of adoption of village or area is to give new ideas of development to the villagers which would improve their living conditions.”
- “Once the trust of the communities is won, they start co-operating with the NSS volunteers and approach them for solution of their problems.”
- “The programme officer must select the projects very carefully as the image of NSS depends upon the successful completion of such projects.
- For adopting a slum, there should be a composite survey team consisting of students drawn from faculties like Arts, Science, Engineering, Medicine, Home Science, Social Work, etc.
Not even in the composite survey team the local people have a place! The whole strategy is marked by the absence of people's participation. All the five points quoted above can almost be seen as don'ts in social work. An intervention of this manner will not lead to sustainable development because of the dependence it breeds. It does not at all assume that the people know their problems best, and that they are capable of handling these problems with some motivation and guidance from NSS and other collaborating agencies. In other words the concept of empowerment is conspicuous by its absence.

Since one of the objectives of the present study is to evolve a suitable conceptual framework and model for communitising education through NSS, it is necessary to dwell at some length on the aspects mentioned above, such as people's participation, empowerment, and sustainable development. Quite a volume of literature already exists on these areas, and these operational goals are pursued by a number of well-meaning voluntary organizations (NGOs) in India as well as elsewhere. In schools of social work these strategies form part of the syllabus. But, somehow or other, NSS has not succeeded in availing these resources, as is evident from the excerpts from NSS manual quoted above. A Govt.-sponsored youth movement with 1.5 million enthusiastic students has immense potential in promoting social development while ensuring the personality development of the volunteers concerned. But it needs to be planned better. It is with this perspective that a whole chapter on Development Perspective for NSS and another on Sustainability, Participation, and Empowerment are included in this study. Section II, which presents four cases of campus community interaction reveals several of the elements of this strategy in practice.
1.4.4.7 Training in NSS

With a view to providing orientation and training to develop right thinking, approach and understanding about the philosophy of NSS, fourteen institutions have been designated as Training and Orientation Centres (TOCs) of NSS. In addition to these, four Training Orientation and Research Centres (TORCs) have also been established. The functions and other details pertaining to TOCs and TORCs are given in NSS Manual\textsuperscript{10}. The training dimension has an important role in NSS. We need to formulate special training strategies and methods for purposes of bringing about attitudinal changes in students. It is for this purpose that a part of the chapter on recommendations is devoted to training.

Unfortunately TOCs and TORCs seem to have proved themselves to be the weakest links in NSS. It is high time the Govt. of India subjected these institutions to a scrutiny to find out the extent to which they have been able to put life and a sense of direction into the functioning of NSS. They often complain about inadequacy of funds, while Govt. of India complains about the dysfunctional or nonfunctional nature of these centres. In fact in an organization which runs on the fuel of voluntarism, these training institutions are the fuel stations. If the fuel tanks are dry, if the motivators themselves have lost motivation, it is a sad state of affairs. As Chaucer, in a different context asked, “if gold rusts, what shall iron do?”\textsuperscript{11} The question of organizational revival in NSS is discussed in the next chapter.

1.4.5 Conclusion

A survey of the evolution of educational thought in India clearly indicates its bias towards social commitment. And a review of the planning process which preceded the formulation of National Service Scheme reveals
that NSS has been designed to promote the social goals of higher education. Unfortunately, even after 30 years of implementation, NSS has not succeeded in influencing the mainstream of educational activity in the country. NSS is an extra-curricular activity today. Until and unless it becomes a curricular activity, its role in communitizing education will remain an unfulfilled promise.
Notes and References

1 Adapted from NSS Manual, Part I, Govt. of India, Ministry of HRD, (New Delhi, 1997)

2 National Service Volunteer Scheme (NSVS) is a scheme in which graduate ex-NSS volunteers, on completion of their studies, can spend a year or two on full time basis in social service activities. Such volunteers get a monthly stipend of Rs.700 from Govt. of India.

3 Govt. of India: *National Policy on Education Recommendation*, para 8.22.

4 Govt. of India: Report of Central Advisory Board of Education Committee on Policy, para 133.4.

5 Govt. of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development: *Programme of Action 1992 on National Policy on Education*, para No.20.3.3.

Figure – 1: NSS Symbol

8 “Area approach to Social Development: A Note on Involvement of University Community” by R.R. Sigh, and a “Regular Activities in Adopted Villages (NSS Manual) are documents of relevance here. They are given as Annexures B and C, respectively.

9 NSS Manual, op. cit, 14-15

10 NSS Manual, op. cit., 107-121.