

National Cadet Corps – The Silent Contributor to Nation Building and National Security

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Introduction

India as a nation, and more importantly the Indian economy, in recent years has certainly started looking up. While a lot has been achieved, a lot more remains to be done as well. Even after seven decades of Independence, many are still deprived of a life of dignity. A humongous development deficit is staring at us in our face. The predicament is compounded by the precarious security situation prevailing in large swathes of our country. The question of greater national dignity merits reflection.

An aspect which stands in our favour in the days to come is our demographic dividend. As is well known, 65 per cent of our population is under the age of 35. This generation has to be empowered to rewrite India's success story. The empowerment process must not only include imparting employable skills but also life skills to transform them into young and dynamic leaders.

National Cadet Corps (NCC), the largest uniformed volunteer organisation in the world, is committed in the business of youth empowerment and is ideally suited to help the nation realise its demographic dividend, thereby making significant contributions to nation building. The military orientation of its training curriculum would also ensure handsome dividends in the security domain.

Nation and Nation Building

Concept of a Nation. When the purists contest that India is not a nation in the classical sense, they are alluding to the diverse and pluralistic character of our nation. The word nation is derived from the Latin word 'natio' which means 'people'. It is generally believed

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that the 'people' constituting a nation must preferably be united by descent, race, language, culture, customs, religion etc. If this was solely true, then India would fail to make the cut to be called a nation by more than a mile. Ernest Renan went ahead to call a nation 'large scale solidarity'.¹ When we talk of the Indian nation, we are identifying it by its geographic and political construct. The many differences (or potential fault-lines) which are intrinsic to our nation highlight the salience of national integration and the need to promote a secular outlook among the citizens. Fostering an abiding sentiment of unity in diversity beyond the cliché should be central to the nation building exercise for India. Here, NCC acts as a major building block.

Concept of Nation Building. In the words of Jeremi Suri, a Professor at Lyndon B Johnson School of Public Affairs in the USA, "Nation building is an effort to build institutions and practices that allow a people to govern themselves in peaceful and prosperous ways."² Among the principles of nation building, Jeremi Suri lists five. He opines that nation building concerns and involves 'people', particularly young people, who would drive the change. Rest of the principles relate to partnerships, processes, problem solving and sense of purpose behind processes.

NCC as an Instrument of Nation Building

Harnessing the Youth Power

A Perception Profile of Young India. An informal survey reveals that the younger generation, although certainly more technology savvy, tends to be materialistic in its outlook and is not inclined towards scholarly pursuits, research and innovation. Motivating the youth to be the engines of change is largely a challenge. If the young people are encouraged to associate themselves with organisations like NCC, perhaps it would play a major role in influencing their mindsets. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam in his address to cadets on 04 Nov 2004 at New Delhi had famously stated, "...in my view, two years NCC training must be made compulsory for all eligible students....at the school or college level".³ Not many would know that for a brief spell in 1963, NCC training was made compulsory for all college students. Owing to budgetary and establishment constraints, the scheme was subsequently withdrawn in 1968.

The Future Citizenry. The whole essence of NCC lies in investment towards the future citizenry of our nation. The NCC harnesses the fountainhead of youthful energy through its aims and objectives and stringently implement range of activities. Over 70 per cent of effort is dedicated to leadership training. The objective of development of character, comradeship, discipline, secular outlook, spirit of adventure and ideal of selfless service in every cadet lies at the bulls eye. Each cadet adopts recently introduced (2017) Cadet Commandments (12 in number), each aimed at being a role model citizen. The tenth commandment directs all cadets to be citizens with gender sensitivity, secular outlook devoid of regional biases.

Footprint – Service to the Socially Deprived

National Cadet Corps from its modest beginnings on 15 Jul 1948 by an Act of Parliament with a subscriber base of 20,000 cadets, today, boasts of a strength of 14 lakh cadets. NCC has a pan-Indian presence covering 16,288 institutions in 703 out of 716 districts of the country. The 8000-plus institutions, which are waitlisted, bear testimony to its popularity. Only untouched districts lie in extreme remote areas or newly carved districts in Manipur and Telangana. What is heartening is that most of NCC's subscription is from the government educational institutions and economically modest households (nearly 80 percent of cadet population) and takes pride in helping this section of the society realise its aspirations, thereby contributing towards equality and development. One may argue that the 15 lakh sanctioned strength of NCC only benefits minuscule proportion of the eligible/target population. Be that as it may, each cadet must be seen as an agent or a catalyst, who in turn, within his sphere of influence i.e. his family, friends and neighbourhood would cast his spell and hence the overall impact of NCC becomes much larger. Going by an estimate of each cadet touching ten others, the target population influenced by NCC exceeds one crore.

National Integration – The Spirit of '*Ubuntu*'

This forms the very basic theme of NCC curriculum. Activities conducted within a state or at the interstate level derive inspiration for the spirit of *Ubuntu* (The South African proverb where 'I am because we are' is the essence of community living). 'Solidarity,

Integration and Dignity' form the focal points of cadet orientation and dispensation.

This is achieved through centrally conducted camps e.g. National Integration Camps including Special Integration Camps held in extremities of the country – deserts, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep Island, Ladakh etc. with pan India participation. Adventure and cultural interface is intrinsic to all these activities.

National Projection – Overseas

Youth exchange programmes are in place with eleven countries. These lie in our immediate neighbourhood – Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives, extended neighbourhood and beyond – Singapore, Central Asian Republics, Vietnam and Russia. In many cases Memorandums of Understanding exist and in other cases there is regular reciprocal participation. Cadets invariably perform with flying colours in all domains - physical prowess, confidence levels, cultural acumen or nationalist spirit.

Women Empowerment

Many social evils still prevail in modern Indian society that resist the forward march of its women folk. India is ranked 29th among 146 countries across the globe on the basis of Gender Inequality Index. Driven by inclusion of women empowerment as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals, NCC has contributed significantly to this cause. Women empowerment has taken a boost with girl cadets reaching a strength of over 4.5 lac (30 per cent) despite social barriers and establishment inadequacies. Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir (Valley), Odisha and Rajasthan have received additional focus. This will indeed be a major contribution towards development goals for our society.

The Social Service and Community Development Charter

NCC's contribution in the field of social and community service is particularly laudable. NCC is one of the mainstays in popularising yoga, promoting cleanliness and spreading digital awareness in the country – a fact which has been acknowledged by the Prime Minister's Office. NCC enters into a 'partnership' with lead ministries and agencies to support the 'processes' related to a few selected themes of contemporary relevance in the field of environment,

health and social issues. Annually, NCC is credited with planting over one lakh saplings and donating more than 50,000 units of blood. NCC institutions and units adopt villages, *bastis*, old age homes, orphanages, parks and public places, which then become a focal point for their social work. Social service and community development activities conducted by NCC take the form of proactive action, rallies, awareness drives, marathons, *nukkad nataks* etc. These activities encourage cadets to take on voluntary work within their communities and neighbourhood to make a humble but no less significant contribution towards nation building.

Command and Control Drives Nationalist Agenda

Management of NCC encompasses all 29 States and seven Union Territories through a Headquarters located at New Delhi and 17 Directorates, at the state level, with further subdivision of units and controlling Headquarters. The entire profile is tri-service in composition. Overall control is exercised by the Ministry of Defence at the centre and at the state level largely by the Education Department. The entire infrastructure, establishment and budgetary provisions are shared by the Centre and States. Although the larger share is supported by the Centre, States do carry substantial share of responsibility making them equal stakeholders. State support is a prerequisite for support by the Centre. Nature of command and control of the whole structure too thus drives a nationalist agenda.

NCC and National Security

If there is any organisation which is ideally suited to contribute in the security domain beyond the traditional security forces, it is the NCC. Acknowledging this, NCC was called out for national service during all the three major wars, viz; 1962, 1965 and 1971. During the 1965 War an extraordinary gazette notification of 09 Sep 1965, outlined the war time duties of Associate NCC Officers (primarily teachers/lecturers trained in NCC role) and NCC cadets above 17 years of age. In 1965, NCC cadets were specifically trained for their war time role in a 'Be Prepared' scheme.

Senior cadets were deployed, in the rear areas in a supportive and augmentation role. They performed or assisted in civil defence tasks, security of installations, maintenance of essential services, enforcement of blackouts, refugee management, casualty

evacuation, traffic control, manning of signal exchanges, augmentation of the workforce in ordnance factories, hospitals, post and telegraph offices and logistic installations, care of families of the martyrs, blood donation, fund mobilisation etc. Cadet Sergeant Pratap Singh was awarded Ashoka Chakra Class III (Shaurya Chakra) for his valiant act during the 1965 War.

While present rules, owing to security and safety considerations, prohibit the employment of cadets in the war zone, it is only a matter of foregone conclusion that in any future war NCC would be called out by invoking national emergency provisions. Cadets with a little bit of reorientation will deliver. NCC provides a ready reserve pool of trained manpower to explore the possibilities of TAisation of the Armed Forces and staffing of mobilisation plan units. New age threats like Cyber Warfare and Information Warfare as also the high technology nature of the future battlefield require specialised skills in the conflict zone. NCC is suited to re-role itself to filling in this capability void.

In its expansion plans, NCC has recently made a conscious decision to enhance its presence in areas vulnerable from the security standpoint, i.e. areas affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE), insurgencies and the coastal areas. NCC has made much headway in such areas in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand in particular. In Bastar and Sukma, cadets have participated in annual camps as well. Coastal areas are also well covered. NCC, for the first time has set foot in Anini village (eastern-most village on Indo-Tibetan border in Arunachal Pradesh) in 2017. In most locations in LWE areas, only NCC activities are conducted without the presence of Security Forces. NCC's ethos and curriculum will ensure that cadets from these areas will not take to weapons in the future. From the border areas such as forward most villages (dhanis) of Barmer/Jaisalmer, NCC has facilitated induction of cadets into Armed Forces as also entry into the Civil Services.

One of the three aims laid down for NCC is to provide a suitable environment to motivate youth to take up a career in the Armed Forces. NCC syllabus and work culture to that extent is largely military oriented. There are vacancies reserved for NCC cadets with certain certification in all training academies including female cadets. Nearly 70 per cent of authorised vacancies are subscribed. Amongst the men, nearly 10 per cent recruitment for

the Army and 5-6 per cent for Air Force and Navy comprise NCC cadets. Given the large base of eligible candidature, these numbers are substantial. These personnel make outstanding soldiers.

The Way Forward - Enhancing Organisational Effectiveness

Expansion Plan. Present establishment of NCC is of 1979 vintage and is inadequate to affect an optimal performance. Any further expansion of cadets strength must be accompanied by review of manpower of both combatants, civilian staff, and other factors. In the present scenario, it is just not feasible to make NCC training compulsory in institutions even with acceptance of diluted standards.

Manpower Management. Sheen of NCC lies in efficacious delivery. Combatants subjected to Army/Navy/Air Force Act remain the basic pillar of NCC. Any modifications to manpower profile must take this into account. Quality Officers and Associate NCC Officers (ANOs) are the other pillars. Work parameters of NCC staff are rather stringent in terms of responsibility and timings. Dilution in manpower profile has direct bearing on efficacy, in fact exponentially. It is pertinent to mention that each NCC unit covers, on an average, 30-35 institutions spread over 100 kms or more, extending to excess of 200 kms in remote areas.

Support Staff for Girl Cadets. Enhancement of the number of girl cadets serves the national cause of women empowerment, particularly of weaker sections. The support staff (i.e. Girl Cadet Instructors and Women NCC Officers) merit quantity upgrade.

Infrastructure and Budgetary Provisions. NCC provisions comprise a composite fixture with regard to infrastructure and budgetary provisions between the Centre and the States. Share of each is fixed by norms and governing rules. Compliance is the key. Existing inadequacies must be eradicated.

Finish School for NCC. A number of NCC cadets come from weaker sections of society (nearly 80 percent). It is desirable to establish Zonal Finishing Schools for ex-NCC cadets that enable them to qualify in 'beyond entry level' assignments. Corporate Social Responsibility of various corporate houses of repute may be co-opted as well.

Synergising Youth Organisations. All youth organisations such as National Service Scheme (NSS), Nehru Yuva Kendra

Sangathan (NYKS) and NCC in particular must synergise efforts to each chosen cause. Implementation should be coordinated on ground at the district level under state and central authorities with accountability. Silo existence must cease.

Incentivisation of NCC. Educational institutions need to harmonise academic curriculum/calendar with NCC curriculum/calendar. Further, some incentives in terms of bonus awards (academics) and reservations in job assignments in uniformed services will act as great motivators for the cadets.

Conclusion

NCC in many ways is a 'silent revolution' committed to the empowerment of youth and is making invaluable contributions towards nation building and in the field of security in all its manifestations. While the NCC curriculum is wholesome and well-structured and is reviewed periodically to keep it contemporary, there may be issues of deliverance which are largely dependent on the competence and motivation of the faculty or trainers and the presence of requisite enablers (budgetary support, infrastructure, establishment, incentives etc.). For NCC to succeed in its noble mission, it needs the unwavering support of all the stakeholders – the Centre and the State governments, the Armed Forces, the educational institutions, parents, guardians and the cadets. The motto of NCC 'Unity and Discipline' could not have been more apt. It flags two vital issues of contemporary concern. A united and disciplined citizenry would be central to realisation of India's dreams to emerge as a secure and prosperous nation.

Endnotes

¹ Renan Ernest (19820, "What is Nation? The Poetry of the Celtic Races and Other Essays", London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co. Available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/nation>, accessed on 18 Nov 2017.

² Suri Jeremi, (2011), "Liberty Surest Guardian: American Nation-Building Foundation to Obama", Simon and Schuster, available at <https://news.utexas.edu/2011/09/26/nation-building>. Accessed on 18 Nov 2017.

³ Chhetri RS, (2006), "Grooming Tomorrows Leaders : The National Cadet Corps 1917-2006", New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, pp 149.