

## **Permanent Commission to Women Officers in Army**

### **Why in news?**

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has issued the formal Government Sanction Letter for grant of Permanent Commission (PC) to women officers in the Army.

### **What is a Permanent Commission?**

- A Permanent Commission (PC) means a career in the army until one retires.
- If one gets selected through PC, one has the option to serve the country up to the full age of retirement.

### **What is the government's order?**

- The government's order specifies the grant of PC to Short Service Commissioned (SSC) women officers in all the 10 streams of the Army in which they presently serve.
- The same procedure for male SSC officers will be followed for women to give PC.
- The order follows a Supreme Court verdict in February 2020.

### **What was the Supreme Court verdict?**

- About 322 women officers had approached the apex court on the issue of PC.
- The court directed the government to ensure that women officers, irrespective of their years of service, are granted PC in the army.
- The issue of command postings came up in the discussion on subsequent avenues after the grant of PC.
- In its appeal, the government cited “physical” and “physiological limitations” in granting command positions to women officers.
- To this, the Supreme Court said there was need for administrative will and “change of mindset” in this regard.
- The court thus added that the woman officers would be eligible for command posting.
- The SC bench observed that there could not be absolute exclusion of women officers for command assignments, and that they should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### **Why is this significant?**

- The Army is often seen as the preserve of men.
- But enough women have fought heroic battles to bust that myth.
- From Rani of Jhansi in the past to Squadron Leader Minty Agarwal of the Indian Air Force, there are many to cite.
- [Minty Agarwal, in 2019, was part of the team that guided Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman during the Balakot airstrike carried out by the IAF.]
- But the battle to break a gender stereotype and provide equal opportunities for women in the Army had to be fought right up to the Supreme Court.
- The government initially did not take serious a Delhi High Court ruling in the litigants' favour 10 years ago.
- Then in the Supreme Court, the litigants concerns were evident with the views expressed by the government.
- The government pointed at "physiological limitations" of women officers.
- These were cited as great challenges for women officers to meet the exigencies of service.
- But this misogyny was called out by the Supreme Court, which directed for equal treatment.
- Given this past, the present decision will go a long way in ending a prejudice associated with the Army.

### **What is the way forward?**

- Elsewhere in the world, in countries such as the US and Israel, women are allowed in active combat.
- In India, the Supreme Court had to forcefully nudge the government to make women's role in the Army more inclusive.
- Of the 40,825 officers serving in the Army, a mere 1,653 are women.
- The overall percentage of women at all levels of the armed forces needs to be increased.
- To usher in a change in a regressive mindset prevalent in the society, a lot more must be done on gender sensitisation.
- A gender barrier may have fallen, but the war against inequity has a long way to go.

**Source: The Hindu**