

## Women in Indian Armed Forces

### Why in news?

Recently Supreme Court tells Centre to grant permanent commission to women officers in Indian Coast Guard.

### How the women military officers are recruited in Indian army?

- **Permanent commission**- In the Indian Army it means a career until the age of retirement.
- **Short Service Commission**- The jobs are for a few years, a few officers get to opt for permanent commissions based on available vacancies.
- **1992**- For the first time women officers were inducted in the Indian army.
- **Tenure**- They were commissioned for 5 year periods in certain streams like the Army Education Corps and the Corps of Engineers.
- **Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES)** - It had shorter pre-commission training periods than those stipulated for men commissioned under the SSC scheme.
- **Men**- They could be commissioned for 10 year periods, which could be extended up to 14 years.

| Armed forces     | % of women in armed forces |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| Indian Army      | 0.56%                      |
| Indian Air Force | 1.08%                      |
| Indian Navy      | 6.5%                       |

- **SSC scheme for women**- In 2006, WSES scheme was replaced by the SSC scheme for women.
- Existing WSES officers were given the option to move to the new scheme.
- **Limited options**- Infantry and armoured corps were not open to women.

| Key aspects           | Permanent Commission  | Short Service Commission   |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| <b>About</b>          | A <b>long-term career option</b> until retirement age.                                  | A <b>temporary commission</b> for a specific duration (usually 10-14 years). |
| <b>Tenure</b>         | Officers serve until they reach the age of superannuation (usually around 54-58 years). | Officers serve for a fixed term and have the option to extend their service. |
| <b>Availability</b>   | Available to both men and women.  | Initially, SSC was not open to women, but this changed over time.            |
| <b>Stream options</b> | Officers can choose from various streams based on their qualifications and preferences. | SSC officers are usually recruited for specific roles or projects.           |

|                |                                       |  |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Pension</b> | Eligible for pension after retirement | No pension after retirement, but they receive other benefits during service. |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|--|

### What is the judiciary's ruling for women in armed forces?

- **Formation of permanent commission**-The court justified the women's right to seek a Permanent Commission (PC) or a full-length career, bringing them on par with their male counterparts in various streams of the Army.

*Prior only male SSC officers could opt for permanent commission after 10 years of service, depriving women officers of government pension, which is granted after 20 years of service.*

- **Centre's stand**- The Centre argued that Article 33 of the Constitution allows fundamental rights to be restricted when it comes to the armed forces.
- It also argued that there were "dangers involved in serving in the army" and adverse service conditions including "absence of privacy in field and insurgency areas, maternity issues and child care".
- The Supreme Court, in its ruling, emphasized the need for a change in attitudes and mindsets even 70 years after India's independence, recognizing the commitment to constitutional values.
- **Number 5 selection board**- It was constituted in 2020 by Army to induct all eligible female officers as permanent commission officers, it includes a women officer in the rank of brigadier.
- **Ex-servicemen status**- There were issues regarding the denial of ex-servicemen status to military nurses, potentially affecting their re-employment opportunities in civil services.
- Recently, a division bench of the Punjab and Haryana High Court ruled that Military Nursing Service (MNS) officers cannot be denied ex-servicemen status under the Punjab Recruitment of Ex-Servicemen Rules, 1982.
- Former permanent commissioned officer Lt. Selina John, of the Military Nursing Service, was released from employment in 1988 on grounds of her marriage.

- MNS is an integral part of the Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS), which includes the Army Medical Corps (AMC) and Army Dental Corps (ADC).
- AFMS personnel serve in India's medical establishments and its officers have played a role in United Nations peacekeeping missions abroad.

- John approached the Armed Forces Tribunal, Lucknow, which called the termination "illegal" and directed her reinstatement with back wages.
- However, the Central government then moved the SC to challenge this order
- **Union of India & Others vs. Ex. Lt. Selina John** -Recently the Supreme Court has directed the Ministry of Defence to pay Rs 60 lakh in compensation stating that her termination was a "coarse case of gender discrimination and inequality."

- **Permanent commission for women officers in ICG-** The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to ensure that eligible women officers get permanent commission in the Indian Coast Guard.
- It said that women cannot be left out and if the government does not do it, the court will do it.

*The Indian Air Force was first among the three services to grant PC to SSC women officers.*

## References

1. [Indian Express-SC tells Centre to grant permanent commission](#)
2. [Indian Express- Court's rule for women in armed forces](#)

