Women as PC Officers

What is the issue?

- This year shall be remembered as a landmark in Indian military history.
- Women officers were allowed to serve as permanently commissioned (PC) officers.

What is the story behind?

- The Supreme Court of India has allowed women to serve as PC officers in 10 combat support arms and services of the Indian Army.
- It directed the central Government to rescind the embargo on command appointments for women officers.
- The government issued a formal sanction offering PC to women officers of the Indian Army.
- This is the culmination of a struggle for equal opportunity that began almost 27 years ago.

What does a grant of PC mean?

- A grant of PC will accrue many other employee benefits, as,
    1. In service career courses (such as the National Defence College, College of Defence Management, the Army War College, etc),
    2. The Defence Services Staff College,
    3. Options in higher studies (such as a Master of Business Administration or a Master of Technology),
    4. Ex-servicemen status and consequent benefits,
    5. Pension, etc.
- Allowing a motivated set of experienced women officers in permanent cadre would be a small way to mitigate the shortage of officers in the Indian Army.

What is the significance of this judgment?

- The judgment is iconic because it,
    1. Allowed women officers equal opportunities to serve in the Army,
    2. Addressed the issue of regressive mindsets.
- The onus of implementing this change rests with the leadership, but the direction has been shown.

How did the struggle culminate?

- The Indian armed forces began inducting women in the non-medical branches in the year 1992, as Short Service Commission (SSC) officers.
- The scheme initially allowed for a five-year service period, which was revised to 14 years.
- In the armed forces, both men and women opt for the SSC.
- However, upon completion of 14 years of service, male officers could get a permanent commission.
- But, women officers were denied this privilege.
- In a quest for equality, many officers of Indian Army and Indian Air Force (IAF) filed cases in the Delhi High Court seeking to remove discrimination between genders.

How did the Indian Army and the IAF respond?

- In Jasmine Kaur vs. Union of India case (2010), the SC adjudicated in favour of granting PC to women IAF officers.
- The IAF was first among the three services to grant PC to SSC women officers.
- The Indian Army chose to appeal in the Supreme Court, citing reasons of peculiar service conditions and operational requirements.

What was the 2019 notification?

- A notification by the Government of India in 2019, suggested PC to women officers with less than 14 years of service.
- This practically left a sizeable set of senior women officers out of the gambit.
- Now with this SC judgment, army women have finally obtained parity with their male counterparts.
- Approximately 30% of women officers in the Indian Army are deployed in combat zones performing similar duties like other officers.
- The policy issued by the government of India in 2019, was discriminatory to exclude them from command positions.

What are the implications of the judgment?

- With the grant of PC, women officers would serve till the age of retirement.
- They will not be forced to look for alternative careers after 14 years.
- This will place women officers on an equal footing with men for promotions, professional growth, and provide job security.
- Selection for command appointments in the Indian Army eluded women officers earlier.
- Now, women officers can be considered for command roles and many other

opportunities to distinguish themselves professionally.

Does the question of gender ability matter?

- The nature of warfare is evolving with the support of technology.
- So, the question of gender ability doesn't matter but performance, opportunity, and a fighting chance matters.
- Countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have been conservative about women in their respective combat arms.
- But others like the Israeli Defense Forces have integrated women.
- India is on the correct path to further integration in future.

What is the other concern with the existing policy?

- The terms of employment of SSC are subject to change and conversions into PC officers are based on force requirements.
- It is possible that based on cadre forecast, an SSC officer may not ever get a chance of converting to PC if there are no vacancies.
- This policy fairly applies to all SSC officers irrespective of gender.
- However, it must be noted that for women, the SSC is the only inroad into the armed forces (except the Medical Corps).
- There is no provision for women to choose defence as a long-term career right at the outset as a PC officer.

What is next?

- The parity of allowing entry of women as permanent cadre needs to be attained soon.
- Only after attaining this, it would truly be a level-playing field in terms of equal opportunity and career advancement.

Source: The Hindu

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