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
About	A ***long-term career option*** until retirement age.	A ***temporary commission*** for a specific duration (usually 10-14 years).
Tenure	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.
Availability	Available to both men and women.	Initially, SSC was not open to women, but this changed over time.
Stream options	Officers can choose from various streams based on their qualifications and preferences.	SSC officers are usually recruited for specific roles or projects.

Pension	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

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