

INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

GENERAL STUDIES I

1. Women in armed forces: new strides, miles to go

Context:

- The Indian Navy announced selection of two women officers as Observers in the helicopter stream, making them **first women airborne combatants** who would be **operating from warships**.
- In another significant development in March, the Supreme Court had upheld that the **women Short Service Commission officers in the Navy** were eligible for **Permanent Commission**.
- The Navy had also inducted the first woman pilot in December last year. A look at what these developments mean for women in the Navy, how the situation has evolved and the road ahead.
- Earlier women were not allowed in the Permanent Commission, which had **created a glass ceiling**. That ceiling has now been shattered with a Supreme Court ruling allowing permanent commission for women.

Brief Background: Women in Indian Navy:

- Prior to 1992, women officers were inducted in the Navy **only in the medical stream** from the Armed Forces Medical Service.
- From July 1992, the Navy started inducting women, initially through a special entry scheme and later through the Short Service Commission, in only select branches of the Navy.
- It needs to be noted like in the Army and the Air Force, women are currently only inducted as Commissioned Officers and not in Other Ranks which are of categories of Junior Commissioned Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers.
- In the early 2000s women officers from the Medical and Logistics stream were deployed on board Naval ships. While these deployments went on only for four-five years, they were discontinued for various reasons.
- In terms of **various challenges** towards **deployment of women** onboard warships, the logistics part is not as challenging as one would imagine, especially as most of the large warships of the Navy do have basic living arrangements that can be allocated for women.

Women officers in new streams:

1. Last December, the Navy announced the **induction of a woman officer as pilot of Dornier aircraft**, which are fixed wing aircraft operating from ashore establishments.
2. Now, the Navy announced induction of two women officers as **observers for the helicopter stream**. Observers are airborne tacticians who fly on board helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft operated by the Navy.
3. Till now women were inducted as observers for fixed wing aircraft which take off and land ashore. Entry in the helicopter stream means that women officers can now be deployed on **frontline warships from which helicopters can operate**.