

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BOMBAY

CIVIL APPELLATE JURISDICTION

WRIT PETITION NO. 2651 OF 2026

Vasant Nagnath Adwal

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra Thr

Its Secretary Ministry Of

Health And Family and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6693 OF 2026

Pravin Maruti Said

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra Thr

Its Secretary Ministry Of

Health And Family and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6690 OF 2026

Ballaleshwar Lala Bhandalkar

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra Thr

Its Secretary Ministry Of

Health And Family and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6672 OF 2026

Vishal Bhagwan Sawane

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra Thr

Its Secretary Ministry Of

Health And Family and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6666 OF 2026

Harshal Santosh Shiratar

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6678 OF 2026

Sanjay Dhanaji Shelke

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of Health and

Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6643 OF 2026

Magbul Hasanbhai Mulani

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6640 OF 2026

Rajendra Vasant Raut

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6628 OF 2026

Ganesh Anil Kolhe

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6654 OF 2026

Rohit Shivaji Ghogare

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6652 OF 2026

Shashikant Kisan Bhawari

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6677 OF 2026

Pradeep Shivaji Pawar

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6679 OF 2026

Shivaji Dattatrya Gole

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6681 OF 2026

Shekhar Keru Lokhande

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6685 OF 2026

Ramdas Sakharam Atole

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6650 OF 2026

Digambar Kanhoba Kharade

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6688 OF 2026

Bhagvan Haushiram Dere

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6626 OF 2026

Suresh Vitthal Dolas

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6625 OF 2026

Rupesh Dashrath Behede

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 6627 OF 2026

Santosh Vilas Dhamdhere

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr Its Sec. Ministry Of

Health and Family Welfare and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7415 OF 2026

Sharad Dattatary Mengade

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thru Secretary and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7401 OF 2026

Aditya Shantaram Gaikwad

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thru Secretary and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7410 OF 2026

Mustak Sikandar Shaikh

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr. Its Secretary Ministry

Of Health and Family Welfare And Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7412 OF 2026

Tejas Rajesh Sherkar

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thru Secretary and Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7406 OF 2026

Kapil Daulat Awate

Petitioner

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr. Its Secretary Ministry

Ry Of Health and Family Welfare And Ors

Respondents

AND

WRIT PETITION NO. 2741 OF 2026

Sandeep Shankar Bhujbal and Ors

Petitioners

versus

The State Of Maharashtra

Thr. Its Secretary Ministry

Of Health and Family

Welfare And Ors

Respondents

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 9431 OF 2026

Akshya Sunil Taru and Ors

Petitioners

versus

State Of Maharashtra Thr

Its Principal Secretary

and Ors

Respondents

Appearance in WP No. 2651 of 2026 :

Mr Raymond Zaiwala, with Avinash Naikwadi, Swati M, Jadhav, Advocates for
Petitioners in all Writ Petitions.

Mr Ravindra Sonba Pachundkar, Advocate for Respondent No. 5-Z.P. in all Writ
Petitions.

Mr P P Kakade a/w P N Diwan, V G Badgujar, A R Deolekar, V M Mali, S H
Kankal, P M J Deshpande, AGPs for State.

Appearance in WP No. 2741 of 2026 & WP No. 9431 of 2026 :

Mr Bhalchandra S Shinde, Advocate for Petitioners.

Mr Ravindra Sonba Pachundkar, Advocate for Respondent No. 5.

Mr Aditya R Deolokar, AGP a/w Priyanka Chavan, AGP for State.

CORAM: G. S. KULKARNI &
DR. NEELA GOKHALE, JJ.
DATE: 25th AUGUST 2026

JUDGMENT: (Per DR. NEELA GOKHALE, J.)

1. **Rule.** Rule made returnable forthwith. With the consent of all the parties, matters are taken up for final hearing. Since the relief sought in all these petitions is identical, the petitions are being decided by the present common Judgment and Order.

2. By these petitions, the Petitioners seek a direction to Respondent No. 5 – Zilla Parishad to pay their wages at the minimum of the pay scale (the lowest grade in the regular pay scale) applicable to regular drivers in the Class III category, and to pay arrears from the date of joining.

3. In brief, the facts of the case are that the Petitioners were appointed as ambulance drivers at various Primary Health Centres in Pune by Respondent No. 5, Zilla Parishad, on a contractual basis. The Petitioners are paid a salary of Rs. 8,000/- to Rs. 11,000/- for a 24-hour duty, and even this salary is paid belatedly. All the Petitioners rely on a series of decisions of the Supreme Court as well as this Court upholding the principle of ‘equal pay for equal work’, directing the Respondents to pay wages to similarly situated employees at the minimum of the pay scale (at the lowest grade) in the regular pay scales paid to regular employees discharging similar duties. The courts have held that no artificial parameter can be invoked to deny the fruits of labour when an employee performs the same work as another employee and further held that no artificial distinction can be made between such employees, whereby one is given a higher salary and the other a lower salary.

4. Mr Raymond Zaiwala, learned Counsel, appeared for all the Petitioners in the group of writ petitions of which the lead petition is WP No. 2651 of 2026 and Mr Bhalchandra S Shinde, learned counsel, appeared for all the Petitioners in the group of petitions of which the lead petitions are WP No. 2741 of 2026 & WP No. 9431 of 2026. Mr Ravindra Sonba Pachundkar, Advocate, represented Respondent No. 5, Zilla Parishad, in all the petitions, and Mr Aditya R Deolokar, learned AGP, represented the State.

5. The Petitioners have placed before us the series of decisions of the Supreme Court as well as this Court answering the issue arising in this batch of petitions; hence, understandably, none of the Respondents has filed their Affidavits in Reply.

We now proceed to discuss the series of judgments relied upon by the Petitioners dealing with the issue at hand.

6. In **State of Punjab & Ors. vs Jagjit Singh & Ors.**¹, the Supreme Court dealt with an issue concerning employees engaged on a regular basis who claimed higher wages under the principle of “equal pay for equal work”. The claim was premised on the ground that the duties and responsibilities they performed were the same as those of the same post for which a higher pay scale was allowed in other government departments. Alternatively, their duties and responsibilities were the same as those of other posts with different designations, but they were placed in a lower pay scale. Having painstakingly considered the parameters laid down by it in its earlier decisions referred to in the said judgment, wherein the principle of "equal pay for equal work" was invoked and considered, the Court delineated the

¹(2017) 1 SCC 148

relevant parameters in this regard. In recording these parameters, the Court also adverted to other judgments pertaining to temporary employees (also dealt with in the said judgment), in which the Supreme Court had occasion to express the legal position with reference to the principle of 'equal pay for equal work'. The Supreme Court in **Jagjit Singh** (supra at pg. 13) recorded its deductions as under: -

“58. In our considered view, it is fallacious to determine artificial parameters to deny fruits of labour. An employee engaged for the same work cannot be paid less than another, who performs the same duties and responsibilities. Certainly not, in a welfare state. Such an action, besides being demeaning, strikes at the very foundation of human dignity. Anyone who is compelled to work at a lesser wage does not do so voluntarily. He does so to provide food and shelter to his family, at the cost of his self-respect and dignity, at the cost of his self-worth, and at the cost of his integrity. For he knows that his dependents would suffer immensely if he does not accept the lesser wage. Any act of paying less wages, as compared to others similarly situate, constitutes an act of exploitative enslavement, emerging out of a domineering position. Undoubtedly, the action is oppressive, suppressive and coercive, as it compels involuntary subjugation.”

7. A Division Bench of this Court (Nagpur Bench), in the matter of **Dhiraj S/o Sudhakar Rao Wankhede & Ors. Vs Zilla Parishad, Chandrapur & Ors.**², while dealing with an identical case of ambulance drivers appointed on a contractual basis seeking parity of pay with regular ambulance drivers, considering the decision of the Supreme Court in **Jagjit Singh** (supra at pg. 13), directed the Respondents therein to pay wages to contractual ambulance drivers equivalent to the minimum pay scale (at the lowest pay grade in the regular pay scale) applicable to regular drivers.

8. The Respondents assailed this Court's decision in the case of **Dhiraj Wankhede** (supra at pg. 14) before the Supreme Court by filing SLP (Civil) Diary No. 12195/2020. By an order dated 22nd February 2021, the Supreme Court dismissed the said SLP.

9. Thereafter, this Court, once again in a clutch of writ petitions led by WP (St) No. 92250/2020, in the matter of **Nagendrayya P. Hiremath vs State of Maharashtra & Ors.**³, decided on 8th December 2020, reiterated the principles laid down by the Supreme Court in **Jagjit Singh** (supra at pg. 13) and by this Court in **Dhiraj Wankhede** (supra at pg. 14) and directed the contractual “ambulance drivers” to be paid wages equivalent to the minimum pay scale (at the lowest pay grade in the regular pay scale) applicable to regular drivers.

10. The decision in **Nagendrayya Hiremath** (supra at pg. 15) was followed by another decision of this Court in the matter of **Rajendra Kamble vs State of Maharashtra**⁴, wherein the Court passed similar directions to the Respondents. The Judgment and Order in **Nagendrayya Hiremath and others** (supra at pg. 15) was challenged by the Chief Executive Officer, Zilla Parishad, Solapur, before the Supreme Court in an SLP (C) No. 8395/2021 titled **The Chief Executive Officer, Zilla Parishad, Solapur vs Ashok Dhondiba Meher**⁵ (one of the Petitioners in the Hiremath case). The Supreme Court, in Paragraphs 10 and 11 of its decision dated 23rd March 2022, dismissed the SLP and held as under:

“10. In the above circumstances, it is noticed that in the present facts the

³2020 SCC OnLine 6920

⁴Writ Petition No. 2012 of 2021, decided on 1st July 2021

⁵2022 SCC OnLine SC 1354

only relief granted by the High Court to the private Respondents herein is to be paid the wages at the minimum of the pay-scale at the lowest grade, the regular pay-scale extended to the regular employees holding the said post. The said benefit ordered to be extended is in tune with the observations of this Court in Jagjit Singh (supra). Further, in the instant facts, what cannot be overlooked is also that the private Respondents thought employed through the contractors are discharging the onerous duties of driving the ambulance, which is operated to provide the benefit of public health to the citizens in the PHC's under the Zilla Parishad, which in turn is for discharging the obligations of the State. Therefore, in such circumstances, the minimum relief that has been granted by the High Court would not call for interference. We at this juncture also take note of the fact that the judgment dated 20.11.2019 passed by the coordinate bench of the High Court in Dhiraj Wankhede (supra), relied upon by the High Court in the instant case, had been assailed before this Court in a Special Leave Petition (Civil) bearing Diary No. 12195/2020. However, the Special Leave Petition came to be dismissed by this Court on 22.02.2021.

11. Accordingly, the above petitions, being devoid of merit, stand dismissed.”

11. Thereafter, the Aurangabad bench of this Court was also faced with another set of petitions involving an identical issue in the matter of **Navnath Bhaskar Dive & Anr. vs The State of Maharashtra through its Secretary & Ors.**⁶, along with 122 petitions, including several contempt petitions. The Division Bench, referring to all the previous decisions of the Supreme Court and this Court, directed payment to the contractual ambulance drivers at par with the regular drivers and issued several directions as under: -

“20. In view of the above, the Agency, meaning the Zilla Parishad or the Contractor, will have to make the assessment of the arrears of such payments from the dates of filing of the Writ Petitions, and accordingly,

⁶Writ Petition No. 1913 of 2024 decided on 30.08.2024

make such payments to these Ambulance Drivers, if not lump-sum, at least in a staggered manner viz. in twelve equal monthly instalments.

21. In view of the above, **all these Writ Petitions are partly allowed**, with the following directions: -

(a) The service conditions applicable to these Petitioners would be maintained as long as the scheme lasts.

(b) The contractual employees shall not be replaced by new contractual employees, either by the Contractor or by the Principal Employer. These directions not to be replaced with another contractual employee would be restricted only to the contractual working Drivers, and in the event of any misconduct/misdemeanour/death of the employee or any such reasons, the Principal Employer/the Contractor would be at liberty to seek services of new Ambulance Drivers. If there are certain contractual Ambulance Drivers who have earlier worked and are not engaged as on date, preference may be granted to them, if any replacement is to be effected.

(c) Considering the grave and serious complaints about Contractors not paying the wages to these Petitioners on the principle laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in **Ashok Dhondiba Meher (supra)**, we deem it appropriate to direct the Principal Employer to directly make the payments of these contractual Ambulance Drivers, vide Bank transactions in their salary bank Account. Such payment shall not be a ground for alleging that the contract is sham and bogus, and no employer/employee relationship should be deemed to be established between such Ambulance Drivers vis-à-vis the Zilla Parishad or the Principal Employer.

(d) If any of the contractual Ambulance Drivers have been terminated or disengaged, they are at liberty to raise an industrial dispute under the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 and carry a reference to the Industrial Tribunal/labour Court, as the case may be, in the light of the law laid down in **Vividh Kamgar Sabha vs Kalyani Steels Ltd. And Anr.**, [2001 (2) SCC 381]; **Cipla Ltd. Vs Maharashtra General Kamgar Union and Ors.**, [2001 (3) SCC 101] and the judgment of the Hon'ble

Supreme Court (5 Judge Bench) in **Steel Authority of India Ltd. And Others Vs National Union Waterfront Workers and Others**, dated 30/08/2001, reported in [AIR 2001 SC 3527].

(e) The conclusions of this Court in **Dhiraj Sudhakar Rao Wankhede (supra)**, which have been sustained by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, would not come in the way of the State Government in framing a scheme in view of the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in **Secretary, State of Karnataka vs Umadevi (supra)**, if so desired by the State Government.

(f) Since we have directed the Zilla Parishads or the State Government or the Rugna Kalyan Samiti (Medical Board), as the case may be, to directly pay the salaries to these contractual employees, it would be within the domain of the Principal Employer to adjust these amounts as against the bills of the Contractors and also by adjusting the service charges.”

12. Recently, the Supreme Court in **The State of Maharashtra through its Secretary & Others vs Kamlesh Dhakal Thakhne and Ors**⁷, upheld the decision of this Court, wherein this Court had issued similar directions to the State to pay the contractual “ambulance drivers”, equivalent to the minimum pay scale (at the lowest pay grade in the regular pay scale) applicable to regular drivers. The Supreme Court, in Paragraph 2 of the said decision, simply dismissed the challenge to the High Court’s Judgment and Order by saying the following:

“2. Since, the issue has already been settled, the order passed and the directions issued by the High Court in paragraph 21 of the impugned order is affirmed and all the Civil Appeals/petitions are, accordingly, disposed of.”

13. The main conclusion from the above discussion is clear: the issue of determining the wages for ambulance drivers—specifically, paying them the

⁷Civil Appeal No. 7288/2025., decided on 17th August 2026

minimum pay scale applicable to regular ambulance drivers at the lowest pay grade —is well established on the principle of ‘equal wages for equal work’. This principle has roots in the early concept of justice. The Respondents are likely aware of this principle but may pretend ignorance. Nevertheless, numerous decisions by this court and the Supreme Court have addressed the payment of wages to contractual ambulance drivers, with the same Respondents opposing in all those cases. Therefore, the Respondents cannot claim ignorance of these legal rulings. Despite knowing the legal position and their responsibilities, their continued refusal to pay wages as directed by this Court and the Supreme Court, based on earlier judgments, is unjustifiable. Their reasons for abstaining from acting in accordance with established law appear to be either a gross administrative sclerosis or an intended merely to harass the contractual drivers. Individuals not petitioning the Court are discriminated against those who have litigated. This is an area where discrimination has reared its ugly head. These persons come from the lowest grade of service. They can ill afford to rush to court. They are not represented by federations or societies and, as such, have hardly any assistance. They need to settle responses individually and rush to court, which, in some cases, may be beyond their reach. Therefore, some of them failed to knock at the doors of the court of justice. In such a situation, even without crystal gazing, the choice is between incurring litigation expenses with an uncertain outcome and suffering discrimination or remaining underpaid day to day. It is a Hobson's choice. Therefore, those who could not come to the court need not be at a comparative disadvantage to those who rushed in here. If they are otherwise similarly situated,

they are entitled to similar treatment, if not by anyone else's hands, but at the hands of this Court. This is exactly the view of the Supreme Court in **Inderpal Yadav v. Union of India**⁸, wherein the Court held that the State should not compel citizens to litigate individually for identical relief.

14. Furthermore, in its decision in the matter of **Lt. Col Suprita Chandel vs Union of India & Ors.**⁹, the Supreme Court, while granting relief to a woman army officer by directing the grant of a permanent commission even though she had not pursued litigation, reiterated that individuals are not required to litigate separately for the same relief obtained by other similarly situated individuals against the action of the government department. The relief granted to similarly situated individuals would be automatically extended to individuals who have not litigated their cases. In this regard, the Court observed as under: -

“14. It is a well settled principle of law that where a citizen aggrieved by an action of the government department has approached the court and obtained a declaration of law in his/her favour, others similarly situated ought to be extended the benefit without the need for them to go to court. [See *Amrit Lal Berry vs. Collector of Central Excise, New Delhi and Others*, (1975) 4 SCC 714]

15. In *K.I. Shephard and Others v. Union of India* (1987) 4 SCC 431, this Court, while reinforcing the above principle, held as under: -

“19. The writ petitions and the appeals must succeed. We set aside the impugned judgments of the Single Judge and Division Bench of the Kerala High Court and direct that each of the three transferee banks should take over the excluded employees on the same terms and conditions of employment under the respective banking companies prior to amalgamation. The employees would

⁸1985 SCC (2) 648

⁹2024 INSC 942

be entitled to the benefit of continuity of service for all purposes including salary and perks throughout the period. We leave it open to the transferee banks to take such action as they consider proper against these employees in accordance with law. Some of the excluded employees have not come to court. There is no justification to penalise them for not having litigated. They too shall be entitled to the same benefits as the petitioners.”

(Emphasis Supplied)

16. No doubt, in exceptional cases where the court has expressly prohibited the extension of the benefit to those who have not approached the court till then or in cases where a grievance in personam is redressed, the matter may acquire a different dimension, and the department may be justified in denying the relief to an individual who claims the extension of the benefit of the said judgment.

17. That is not the situation here. In the submissions too, the respondents have not been able to point out any valid justification as to how the applicants who obtained the benefit from the AFT, Principal Bench in OA No. 111 of 2013 and batch are not identically situated with the appellant. Like the applicants who succeeded, the appellant was also ripe for the third chance before the amended para 4(a) of AI No. 37 of 1978 was introduced on 20.03.2013. The Principal Bench of the AFT, in OA No. 111 of 2013, after clearly holding that the applicants therein were denied the third chance, directed consideration of their cases for permanent absorption by granting one-time age relaxation by considering them 12 under the unamended policy.

18. The respondent authorities on their own should have extended the benefit of the judgment of AFT, Principal Bench in OA No.111 of 2013 and batch to the appellant. To illustrate, take the case of the valiant Indian soldiers bravely guarding the frontiers at Siachen or in other difficult terrain. Thoughts on conditions of service and job perquisites will be last in their mind. Will it be fair to tell them that they will not be given relief even if they are similarly situated, since the judgment they seek to rely on, was passed in the case of certain applicants alone who

moved the court? We think that would be a very unfair scenario. Accepting the stand of the respondents in this case would result in this Court putting its imprimatur on an unreasonable stand adopted by the authorities.

19. The stand of the Department relying on the judgment of this Court in *State of Maharashtra and Another vs. Chandrakant Anant Kulkarni and Others*, (1981) 4 SCC 130 to contend that mere reduction in chance of consideration did not result in deprivation of any right does not appeal to us. The appellant's case is founded on the principle of discrimination. What is sauce for the goose ought to be sauce for the gander. If the applicants in O.A. No. 111 of 2013, whom we find are identically situated to the appellant, were found to be eligible to be given a third chance for promotion, because they acquired eligibility before the amendment to AI No. 37 of 1978 on 20.03.2013, we find no reason why the appellant should not be treated alike."

15. Finally, having regard to the Respondent's repeated insistence on compelling ambulance drivers to approach the courts to seek parity in wages, especially in view of the fact that the issue is settled by a long line of court decisions, we reiterate the direction of this Court in Paragraph 12 of the decision in **Dhiraj Wankhede** (supra at pg. 14) as under: -

"12. we also make it clear that these benefits shall be extendable to all other similarly situated contractual drivers who are not party to this petition"

16. The Respondents' blatant disregard for this Court's earlier directives and the numerous judicial rulings clearly establishing the law on this matter has resulted in multiple unnecessary legal battles involving contractual ambulance drivers demanding equal wages. Some drivers have yet to receive overdue wages. Although previous rulings mandated the Respondents to pay these drivers wages at least

equal to the minimum pay scale for regular drivers from the date of filing their petitions, we now instruct the Respondents to pay the Petitioners the same wages w.e.f. from 22nd February 2021, the date when the Supreme Court upheld the **Dhiraj Wankhede** judgment (supra at pg. 14).

17. Thus, weighing all these relevant considerations and keeping in view all the aspects of the matter, we pass the following order: -

ORDER

- i. The Respondents are directed to pay the Petitioners' wages at the minimum of the applicable pay scale (the lowest grade in the regular pay scale) for regular ambulance drivers.
- ii. The arrears of wages shall be paid from 22nd February 2021, i.e., the date on which the Supreme Court upheld the decision of this Court in the matter of **Dhiraj S/o Sudhakarrao Wankhede and others vs The Zilla Parishad, Chandrapur, through its Chief Executive Officer** or from the date of joining, whichever is later.
- iii. The arrears shall be paid within 3 months of the date of this Order.
- iv. There will be no costs.

18. We hope that we are not called upon to adjudicate future cases involving identical issues involved in the present matter relating to quantum of wages payable to contractual ambulance drivers, as we expect the Respondents to uphold the established legal position and avoid forcing these individuals to seek court relief against the Respondents themselves.

19. The rule is accordingly made absolute.

20. The Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the State of Maharashtra and the Secretary, Department of Rural Development shall circulate a copy of the present Judgment and Order to the Chief Executive Officers of all the Zilla Parishads in the State of Maharashtra, with instructions to adhere to the settled position of law relating to the issue involved in the present matter.

21. No costs.

(DR. NEELA GOKHALE, J)

(G. S. KULKARNI, J.)

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