

1. Heard.
2. Rule. Rule made returnable and heard forthwith with the consent of the parties. The petition is taken up for final disposal at admission stage.
3. The petitioners are the employees of aided private Ashram Schools, which are made party respondents in the writ petition. The petitioners in this petition are claiming their entitlement to higher pay scale under Assured Career Progress

Scheme (for the "the ACPS") on completion of 12 years of qualifying service from the date of their initial appointment.

4. It is the contention of the petitioners that the employees serving in private aided Ashram Schools are discriminated, and have been denied benefits whereas, the benefits are made available to Ashram Schools conducted by the Social Welfare Department, and other private aided schools conducted by other Departments.

5. The issue raised in the petition is no more *res integra* in view of judgment of the Division Bench at Principal Seat in Writ Petition No. 2358/2013 and other companion matters decided on Sept. 21st, 2013. The Division Bench in paragraph Nos. 17 to 19 of the order has observed thus:

"17. The Assured Career Progress Scheme is a welfare scheme which is basically brought about to remove stagnation as very few promotion avenues are available to Group 'C' and 'D' employees. The ACPS enables the eligible employees to be placed in higher pay scale. The eligible non-teaching staff of the aided Secondary Schools in Group 'C' and 'D' category gets the benefit of ACPS. But the similar category of employees in the aided private Ashram Schools who perform identical duties have been denied the benefits of ACPS which infringes their fundamental rights

under Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution of India. The action of denial of benefits to the similarly placed employees discharging similar duties is arbitrary and violative of Article 14 of the Constitution of India.

18. Only on the basis of purported ground of financial crunch, we fail to understand the approach of the State Government of discriminating between the non-teaching staff of aided Ashram Schools and non-teaching staff of aided private schools. At one stage both the Schools were functioning under the control of only one department.

19. In our view the denial of benefit of ACPS amounts to discrimination, which is hit by the rights guaranteed by Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution of India."

6. In view of the decision rendered by the Division Bench, as referred to above, the petition deserves to be allowed and the same is accordingly allowed.

7. The respondents in this petition are directed to examine the cases of each of the individual petitioner for decision whether they satisfy the criteria laid down for claiming benefits under the ACPS to the private aided Government schools under the Government Resolution dated 30th April, 1998 as modified from time to time, and if it

is found that the petitioners are entitled to claim benefits under the Scheme, and they satisfy the eligibility criteria, the respondents shall extend the benefits to the petitioners in this petition. The respondents shall scrutinize the cases of individual petitioners within a period of six months, and extend the benefits to such of the petitioners who are found eligible, as expeditiously as possible preferably, within a period of four months from such scrutiny.

8. Rule made absolute in above terms. The writ petition stands disposed of accordingly.

[SANGITRAO S. PATIL]
JUDGE

[S. S. SHINDE]
JUDGE