

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT PATNA

Letters Patent Appeal No.967 of 2024

In

Civil Writ Jurisdiction Case No.6798 of 2023

Meena Kumari Wife of Sh. Tarkeshwar Sharma, Resident of Village- Rohua
Rajaram, Post Musahri Farm, Police Station- Musahri, District-Muzaffarpur.

... .. Appellant/s

Versus

1. The State of Bihar through the Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Education, Government of Bihar, Patna.
2. The Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Education, Government of Bihar, Patna.
3. The Director, Secondary Education, Government of Bihar, Patna.
4. The Director (Administration-cum-Additional Secretary), Department of Education, Bihar, Patna.
5. The Regional Deputy Director of Education, Muzaffarpur.
6. The District Magistrate, Muzaffarpur.
7. The District Education Officer, Muzaffarpur.
8. The Accountant General (A and E), Bihar, Patna.

... .. Respondent/s

Appearance :

For the Appellant/s : Mr. Purushottam Kr. Jha, Advocate
Mr. Manoj Kumar, Advocate
Ms. Lakshmana, Advocate
For the Respondent/s : Mr. Addl. Advocate General 13

CORAM: HONOURABLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE

and

HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE PARTHA SARTHY

ORAL JUDGMENT

(Per: HONOURABLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE)

Date : 29-10-2024

The present appeal is similar to that disposed of in
LPA No. 1219 of 2023 (*Kamini Kumari and Ors Vs. the State
of Bihar and Anr. & its analogous cases*). The writ petitions
from which the appeals arise, were cases in which the challenge



was to the domestic enquiry proceedings initiated against teachers appointed long back, on allegations of their appointments having been made irregularly. The enquiries concluded with termination, some of which orders were once successfully challenged before this Court and again the very same consequence was visited on the teachers who were still in service; after a *de novo* proceedings as permitted by this Court. As against those who had retired; 100% of their pensions were withheld on the conclusion of enquiry proceedings. The domestic enquiry proceedings were initiated on the ground that the teachers who were the petitioners and the appellants, were appointed irregularly between 1980 to 1990.

2. In the earlier batch of writ petitions, it was noticed that in the year 1998 by reason of an order dated 18.12.1998 passed in a Public Interest Litigation; ***CWJC No. 9847 of 1998 (Brajesh Kumar Sinha and Ors Vs. the State of Bihar and Anr)***, there was a direction to the Central Bureau of Investigation to carry out investigation into the alleged irregular appointments. The CBI submitted its report on 09.11.2004 before the Chief Secretary, State of Bihar; but no FIR was registered or any criminal proceedings were initiated. The Government slept over the matter despite receipt of the CBI



report. In the year 2016, another PIL was filed numbered as ***CWJC No. 10002 of 2016 (Kaushal Kumar Vs. the State of Bihar and Ors)*** in which the State was called upon to apprise this Court as to what transpired after the CBI enquiry report was filed. This led to a spate of domestic enquiry proceedings which were carried out in total violation of the principles of natural justice and also absolute disregard of the principles governing domestic enquiries; as enjoined upon in the Bihar (Classification Control and Appeal) Rules as also the Bihar Pension Rules.

3. A number of writ petitions were filed and a group of them in ***Shanti Kumari Vs. State of Bihar (CWJC No. 17904 of 2016)*** were disposed of on 17.01.2017 finding that the petitioners, therein, who were teachers were deprived of a reasonable opportunity to canvass their respective cases, produce relevant documents and also the binding authorities relating to domestic enquiries. The Writ Court set aside the domestic enquiry proceedings and the termination orders passed, but left liberty to the State to proceed *de novo* with the enquiry proceedings.

4. It is based on such liberty reserved that the proceedings were taken against a number of teachers, some of whom had retired by the time the proceedings were initiated.



Others who were reinstated in service by reason of the earlier writ proceedings having set aside the termination orders, were also proceeded with. Some of the writ petitions were filed against the proceedings initiated, others against the termination orders and many against the withholding of pension after retirement; which withholding was also of 100 per cent of applicable pension.

5. This Court in ***Kamini Kumari (supra)*** found that the proceedings against retired employees were against Rule-43(b) and Rule-139 of the Bihar Pension Rules. Reliance was also placed on the decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***State of Bihar Vs Md. Idrish Ansari; 1995 Supp 3 SCC 6.***

6. Following the declaration in ***Md. Idrish Ansari (supra)***, it was held that the right of withholding of pension or any part of it permanently or for a specified period by virtue of Sub clause-(i) and (ii) of Clause-(a) of the *proviso* to Rule 43(b) of the Bihar Pension Rules had to necessarily satisfy two requirements. One, that it can be instituted only with the sanction of the State Government and second, it can only be with respect to an event which took place not more than four years before the institution of such proceedings. All the proceedings which were taken up against the retired employees



were with respect to the irregular appointments made between 1980 to 1990 far beyond the four-year period provided. There was also no sanction obtained from the State Government in any of the cases.

7. Reliance was also placed on Rule-139 which Rule was also interpreted in ***Md. Idrish Ansari*** (*supra*). Rule-139 of the Bihar Pension Rules, is extracted hereinbelow: -

“Rule 139:-

(a) The full pension admissible under the rules is not to be given as a matter of course, or unless the service rendered has been really approved.

(b) If the service has not been thoroughly satisfactory, the authority sanctioning the pension should make such reduction in the amount as it thinks proper.

(c) The State Government reserve to themselves the powers of revising an order relating to pension passed by subordinate authorities under their control, if they are satisfied that the service of the pensioner was not thoroughly satisfactory or that there was proof of grave misconduct on his part while in service. No such power shall, however, be exercised without giving the pensioner concerned a reasonable opportunity of showing cause against the action proposed to be taken in regard to his pension, nor any such power shall be exercised after the expiry of three years from the date of the order sanctioning the pension was first passed.”

8. Following the forecited judgment; in ***Kamini Kumari*** (*supra*), it was held so in paragraph no. 25, which is extracted hereinbelow: -



“25. We have to notice that there are two situations provided under Rule 139 as per clause (b) and clause (c), where there can be a reduction of pension. Clause (b) comes into play when the service is found to be thoroughly unsatisfactory. No such finding has been entered into any of the cases before us. Clause (c) relates to the power of revising an order of pension by the State Government, on the order being passed of any sub-ordinate authority. Therein also, there should be satisfaction, either that the pensioners service was not thoroughly satisfactory or that there was proof of grave misconduct on his part, while in service. There is no allegation of unsatisfactory service raised against any of the appellants, we recall. There is also no allegation of misconduct and what is alleged is an appointment having been obtained irregularly, which relates back to more than three decades. The disciplinary inquiry initiated itself is illegal for want of sanction and the incident complained of being far earlier to that provided under Rule 43(b); thus the initiation itself stands vitiated. The punishment imposed under Section 139(c) is also not sustainable, going by the Pension Rules. We have to set aside both the impugned orders in C.W.J.C. No.8020 of 2022.”

9. Based on the above findings, it was held so in paragraph no. 31, extracted hereinbelow: -

“31. We have to notice the Explanation to Rule 43 which saves the application of the requirement, as per the proviso to the Rules for sanction or for the misconduct to be one committed within four years prior to retirement. The Explanation deems valid, any disciplinary proceeding instituted by framing of charges or by putting the Government servant under suspension, from an earlier date, as properly instituted from that earlier date. The appellants were not suspended before retirement. Though, disciplinary proceedings were initiated prior to retirement, the punishment imposed was set aside. De novo proceedings were permitted but despite opportunity so to do prior to retirement was available, no such proceedings were initiated till their retirement. The subsequent proceedings initiated hence, had to comply with the proviso to Rule 43(b). The proceedings are found to be illegally initiated and hence, the order of



punishment also is liable to be set aside.”

10. Further, it was noticed that even in the enquiry carried out, the CBI report was not produced and it was not marked through the officer who prepared it; which alone can be valid proof of the document, even in a departmental proceeding. Mere, tabulation of the irregularity alleged against each teacher was produced but not proved in the enquiry through a witness. It was also held so, in the matter of the CBI report and the proceedings taken pursuant to it in paragraph no. 42, extracted hereinbelow: -

“42. At the risk of repetition, it has to be stated that the appointments made in the year 1981, 1988 and 1989 were subjected to a CBI inquiry, the report of which was filed in the year 2004. Apparently no FIR was lodged and the reports submitted remained with the State Government, without any further action. It was long after, in the year 2016 that a Public Interest Litigation motivated the State Government into taking action. The order in the PIL only directed the State Government to take proceedings in accordance with law. We have found that the State Government had flouted all principles of fairness in disciplinary inquiry and also violated the specific rules of procedure as brought out under Article 309 of the Constitution of India.”

11. ***Roop Singh Negi Vs. Punjab National Bank; (2009) 2 SCC 570*** was specifically noticed to reiterate that departmental proceeding is a quasi-judicial proceeding, the enquiry officer perform in a quasi-judicial function and the



charges levelled against the delinquent requiring to be proved. The enquiry officer, it was held had a duty to arrive at a finding based on the materials brought on record by the parties. A mere report filed by the investigating officer cannot be treated as evidence in the disciplinary proceeding, especially when, no witness was examined to prove the documents, was the authoritative pronouncement.

12. Based on the aforesaid findings, this Court set aside the orders of terminations as also the orders of withholding pension and directed interest to be paid on failure to compute the arrears and pay the same within four months as also awarded Rs. 5000/- as cost in the individual writ petitions.

13. We additionally observe that the allegations raised in the Enquiry Report of the CBI were that, an advertisement was not issued, candidates were not sourced from the Employment Exchange, reservation roster was not followed, sanction of the Competent authority was not obtained and there was no interview; in the appointment of the teachers who were proceeded with. These are allegations against the government officers who appointed the teachers and not necessarily a misconduct committed by the newly appointed teachers. Indisputably all the teachers who had service had an



unblemished record and there was nothing revealed in their service regarding their incapacity to discharge their duties or dis-entitlement to be so appointed.

14. The appellant was appointed as a teacher in the Lower Subordinate Education Service vide Office Order dated 09.04.1981 and joined in the Government Girls Middle School, Hajipur on 10.04.1981. The appellant was promoted to Subordinate Education Service (Female Cadre) by Memo No. 286 dated 26.04.1991 (Anenxure-1) and gave her joining as a Lecturer in Women Primary Teacher Training College, Dumara, Sitamarhi and lastly transferred to Chapman Government girls High School, Muzaffarpur and superannuated from there as a Senior Lecturer on 30.06.2018.

15. The appellant, while in service, was then proceeded with departmentally on 21.10.2016, alleging purported irregularities in her initial appointment, on the basis of the CBI report, from which one page of CBI report as relatable to the appellant along with a memo of charge was furnished to her. This was after 35 years of appointment and unblemished service throughout.

16. The memo of charge is produced at Annexure-4 series Page 32 dated 13.10.2016, to which the appellant filed her



explanation on 18.11.2016 at Annexure-4. The Joint Secretary, who was the Conducting Officer submitted enquiry report finding no charge proved against the appellant by Annexure-7 dated 28.08.2018 to the Director (Administration)-cum-Additional Secretary, Education Department (Respondent No.4). Thereafter, the appellant, for grant of retirement benefits made representations to the authorities dated 17.03.2020 and 12.04.2021, which yielded no result. Then the appellant filed CWJC No. 11693 of 2021 for payment of her retirement benefits. During pendency of the aforesaid writ petition, the appellant was served with second show cause notice dated 31.08.2021 (Annexure-10) upon enquiry report dated 28.08.2018 (Annexure-7), to which also she submitted a detailed explanation on 18.09.2021 by Annexure-11 of the writ petition.

17. On 21.03.2022 by an Office Order it was decided to convert the departmental proceeding into a proceeding under Rule 43(b) of the Bihar Pension Rules; which is produced at Annexure-12.

18. None of the explanations furnished by the appellant was considered and in a perfunctory manner, at the time of hearing of the aforesaid CWJC No. 11693 of 2021, the



appellant was served with an order of punishment vide Notification contained in Memo No. 1656 dated 21.03.2022, issued by the Special Secretary-cum-Director(Administration), Education Department, Government of Bihar through a counter affidavit filed, whereby 100% pension of the appellant was withheld. CWJC No. 11693 of 2021 was dismissed with liberty to challenge the order of punishment dated 21.03.2022, which order of punishment was challenged in a writ petition, CWJC No. 6798 of 2023. The writ petition was disposed of granting liberty to the appellant to prefer an appeal before the Statutory Appellate Authority, which order is impugned in the appeal.

19. Despite there being a sanction in the case of the appellant under Rule 43(b), as we noticed, it suffers from the flaw of the proceedings having been initiated with respect to an incident which happened decades back. The enquiry proceedings were also vitiated for the reasons stated in ***Kamini Kumari*** (supra). The enquiry report found that both the charges alleged against the delinquent was not proved by the department. The two charges against the petitioner were that District Inspector of Schools who appointed her was not the competent authority and there was no roster clearance obtained before appointment. The petitioner produced a letter of the



Director of Education indicating the authority of the District Inspector of Schools to make appointments; which stood uncontroverted. As for roster clearance the Enquiry Officer found that this was the responsibility of the appointing authority and not the appointee. There was no evidence led as against the charges. Further the second show-cause notice merely repeated the allegations, which were not proved. There is absolutely no reasoning or any evidence referred to in the second show-cause notice to differ from the findings of the Enquiry Officer.

20. The learned Single Judge by the impugned order had relegated the petitioner to the appellate authority and normally we would not have interfered. However, in the context of the department having led no evidence in the enquiry to prove the charges we are of the opinion that this is a fit case where Article 226 of the Constitution of India has to be invoked; since there is a clear abuse of process of law. The impugned order dated 09.09.2024 as well as order of withholding of 100% pension contained in Memo No. 1656 dated 21.03.2022, stand set aside.

21. The appellant shall be paid the entire pensionary dues, as has been directed in ***Kamini Kumari*** (supra). The interest liability shall also arise, if the dues are not paid within



four months from today. In which circumstance, the liability of interest paid by the State can be recovered from whichever officer, who commits default and occasions delay. The appellant shall further be entitled to be paid Rs. 5000/- costs of the litigation.

22. The appeal stands allowed.

23. Interlocutory application, if any, shall stand closed.

(K. Vinod Chandran, CJ)

(Partha Sarthy, J)

Aditya/-

AFR/NAFR	NAFR
CAV DATE	
Uploading Date	23.11.2024.
Transmission Date	

