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WA No. 3552 of 2023

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED : 24.05.2024

CORAM :

THE HONOURABLE MR. R. MAHADEVAN, ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE
and
THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE MOHAMMED SHAFFIQ

Writ Appeal No. 3552 of 2023
and
CMP Nos. 29039 and 29040 of 2023

T. Jothimalar

.. Appellant

Versus

1. The State of Tamil Nadu
rep. by its Principal Secretary to Government
School Education Department
Fort St. George, Chennai - 600 009

2. The Director of School Education
DPI Campus, College Road
Chennai - 600 006

3. Teachers Recruitment Board
4th Floor, DPI Campus
College Road, Chennai - 600 006

.. Respondents

Writ appeal filed under Clause 15 of Letters Patent against the order dated 23.11.2023 passed in WP No. 33050 of 2023 on the file of this Court.



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For Appellant : Ms. Kavitha Nithyanandam
For Respondents : Mr. U.M. Ravichandran
Special Government Pleader for RR1 and 2

Mr. R. Neelakandan
Additional Advocate General
assisted by Mr. R. Siddharth
Government Advocate for R3

JUDGMENT

The Acting Chief Justice

The appellant has come forward with this intra-court appeal aggrieved by the order dated 23.11.2023 of the learned Judge, dismissing the Writ Petition No. 33050 Of 2023 filed by her.

2. The appellant has filed the aforesaid writ petition praying to issue a Writ of Mandamus directing the third respondent to award one mark to her for Question No. 26 of Master Question paper for the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) examination held on 11.02.2023 and to declare her as having passed in the TET 2023 and to award pass certificate to her.

3. According to the appellant, she is a holder of B.Sc. degree with B.Ed. In response to the notification issued by the respondents for conducting TET examination, the appellant applied for the same in the year 2022 and



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participated in the written examination conducted on 11.02.2023 - TET Paper-II, Tamil - Social Science. Subsequently, the third respondent published the results during March 2023, declaring that the appellant had secured 80 marks, as against the minimum pass mark of 82. After publication of results, some of the candidates have approached the respondents for revision of the marks on the ground that certain questions and key answers set by them are incorrect. Accordingly, revised marks were awarded by the respondents as per which the marks secured by the appellant were scaled up from 80 to 81.

4. The appellant further stated that while publishing the revised marks, the respondents did not award one more mark to her for question No.26. According to the appellant, for Question No.26, the correct answer is A3, which she had rightly marked. However, the respondents, based on the expert opinion, have refused to award one mark for her and instead, declared that A4 is the correct answer for Question No.26.

5. The grievance of the appellant before the learned Judge was two-fold. Firstly, as per the approved text book (Tamil Nadu Open University - B.Ed. - Second Year - Science Teaching - Part - II) the correct answer for question No. 26 is A3 and not A4 and therefore, the third respondent ought to



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have awarded one more mark to her and declared as having passed TET.

Secondly, in spite of the fact that the appellant had established that the answer given by her to the disputed question No.26 is correct, mark has not been awarded, with the result, she is unable to apply for the post of Graduate Teacher/Block Resource Teacher Educator notified by the respondents.

6. When the appeals filed by other similarly placed persons like the appellants in W.A. Nos. 3463 and 3464 of 2023 were taken up for hearing, this Court passed an order dated 13.12.2023 permitting the appellants to submit their online applications along with the registration numbers as required by the Teachers Recruitment Board enabling them to apply for the post in question, however, such permission granted is subject to the result of the writ appeals. Based on the said order dated 13.12.2023, the appellant also submitted her application online for selection and appointment to the post of Graduate Teacher.

7. (i) The learned counsel for the appellant would vehemently contend that the appellant prepared for the examination by reading the text books recommended by the respondents. Therefore, the various questions set by the respondents have been answered by the appellant as provided in the text books



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approved by the Government of Tamil Nadu. As far as the disputed question No.26 is concerned, the correct answer is A3 and it was correctly written by the appellant. However, the expert body, without any reason, has concluded that the answer to question No.26 is A4. The learned counsel invited the notice of this Court to question No.26. Question No.26 is "which one of the following is not a part of teaching". The answers set by the respondents are (A1) providing true knowledge (A2) creating situation of learning (A3) adjustment environment and (A4) Coaching and training. According to the learned counsel, the fourth answer namely "coaching and training" may not be a correct answer inasmuch as coaching and training are inherent in the process of teaching. Therefore, the learned counsel submitted that the conclusion reached by the experts is inaccurate, unreasonable and arbitrary. On the other hand, the answer No.3 written by the appellant is more accurate and has a nexus to the question given by the respondents. In this context, the learned counsel for the appellant placed reliance on the decision of the Honourable Supreme Court in the case of **Kanpur University, through vice Chancellor and others vs. Samir Gupta and others** reported in **AIR 1983 SC 1230** wherein it was held that for the mistake committed by the educational authorities, the student cannot be penalised. In Para Nos. 16 and 17, it was held as follows:-



"16. Shri. Kacker, who appears on behalf of the university, contended that no challenge should be allowed to be made to the correctness of a key answer unless, on the face of it, it is wrong. We agree that the key-answer should be assumed to be correct unless it is proved to be wrong and that it should not be held to be wrong by an inferential process of reasoning or by a process of rationalisation. It must be clearly demonstrated to be wrong, that is to say, it must be such as no reasonable body of men well-versed in the particular subject would regard as correct. The contention of the University is falsified in this case by a large number of acknowledged text books, which are commonly read by students in U.P. Those text-books leave no room for doubt that the answer given by the students is correct and the key answer is incorrect.

17. Students who have passed their intermediate Board examination are eligible to appear for the entrance test for admission to the medical colleges in U.P. Certain books are prescribed for the Intermediate Board Examination and such knowledge of the subjects as the students have is derived from what is contained in those text-books. Those text-books support the case of the students fully. If this were a case of doubt, we would have unquestionably preferred the key answer. But if the matter is beyond the realm of doubt, it would be unfair to penalise the students, for not giving an answer which accords with the key answer, that is to say, with an answer which demonstrated to be wrong."

(ii) The learned counsel for the appellant also relied on the decision of the Honourable Supreme Court in the case of **Ran Vijay Singh and others vs. State of U.P. and others** reported in **AIR 2018 SC 52**. In that case, the High Court dismissed the writ petitions on the ground that there is no provision for re-evaluating the question papers. On appeal, the Honourable Supreme Court held that even in the absence of provision for re-evaluation, if it is established that the Selection Board has failed to discharge their statutory obligation to hold the selection carefully and meticulously, then the Court can step in and permit re-evaluation. Thus, it was held that if a statute, Rule or regulation



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governing an examination does not permit re-evaluation or scrutiny of an answer sheet, then the Court may permit re-evaluation or scrutiny if it is demonstrated very clearly that a material error has been committed in the conduct of the examination.

(iii) The learned counsel for the appellant further relied on the decision of the Honourable Supreme Court in the case of **Rishal and others vs. Rajasthan Public Service Commission and others** reported in *Manu/SC/1642/2018*. In that case the Honourable Supreme Court appointed an expert committee to re-evaluate the question papers. The report of the expert was served on the appellants. On scrutiny, the appellants submitted that certain answers given by the Expert Committee are still not correct and they have also demonstrated before the Honourable Supreme Court. After perusing the opinion of the expert body and the submissions made by the counsel for the appellants, the Honourable Supreme Court directed the Rajasthan Public Service Commission to revise the result of all the candidates, including the appellants and to award marks thereof. It was also held that even those who have not approached the Court are also entitled to the benefit of the said order.

(iv) The learned counsel for the appellant also placed reliance on the



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decision of the Honourable Supreme Court in **U.P.P.S.C. and others vs.**

Rahul Singh and others reported in **AIR 2018 SC 2861** to contend that even the opinion given by the experts was on the basis of the reference made in the text books and therefore, reliance placed on the text book is justifiable. In Para No.14, it was held that the stand of the Commission is also supported by certain text books and therefore, it is reliable.

(v) In effect, the learned counsel for the appellant submitted that even the experts failed to take note of the nature of question No. 26 and the correct answer for the same. The learned counsel therefore submitted that the opinion of the experts is unjust and arbitrary and it need not be relied on and consequently, the respondents must be directed to award one more mark to the appellant for question No.26.

8.(i) The learned Additional Advocate General appearing for the third respondent would vehemently oppose the writ appeal and contend that the experts in the field have arrived at an opinion and based on the same, revised mark list was published by the third respondent. As far as the appellant is concerned, the answer provided by her to Question No.26 is not correct as per the opinion of the experts. When experts in the field have examined the



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objections raised by the candidates, including the appellant and submitted their report, it cannot be subjected to judicial scrutiny under Article 226 of the Constitution of India. It is further submitted that after thorough scrutiny by the subject experts, the final key was arrived at on the basis of which the computer based examination for TET Paper II was evaluated. The revised and final key arrived at by the experts were published along with the results on 27.07.2023 in the official website of the third respondent/Board and it is final. The release of final key answers pertains to 84 objections made by the candidates including the appellant and they were thoroughly scrutinised by the experts committee and a decision has been arrived. As per the decision of the experts, re-verification was done for all sessions and all questions. On the basis of the report of the experts, 15 questions in 11 sessions were revised and the revised result was published on 27.07.2023. Thus, the question challenged by the appellant has already been scrutinised by the experts in the field.

(ii) The learned Additional Advocate General further submitted that the answer keys challenged by the appellant have already been scrutinised by the Board and revised mark list was published and it has attained finality. Challenging the revised mark list, writ petitions were filed and they were dismissed. While so, at this stage, the relief sought by the appellant in this appeal to award one mark to her cannot be countenanced and it has to be



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rejected.

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(iii) The learned Additional Advocate General placed reliance on the decision of the Honourable Supreme Court in the case of **Mahesh Kumar vs. Staff Selection Commission and another** passed in SLP (C) No. 1951 of 2022 wherein it was held as follows:-

"The grievance voiced by the petitioner before the High Court was that certain marks which were deducted ought not to have been deducted. Basically, the issue before the High Court was evaluation of the answer scripts of the petitioner. The High Court has rightly refused to entertain the writ petition by observing that when the conscious decision has been taken by the experts and the Courts have no expertise in the academic matter, cannot interfere with the same. Hence, the Special Leave Petition stands dismissed."

(iv) The learned Additional Advocate General also placed reliance on the judgment dated 08.09.2014 passed in the case of **B. Florance Mary and another vs. The Chairman, TRB in W.A. Nos. 1097 and 1099 of 2014** wherein a Division Bench of this Court held thus:-

"6. Coming to the contention of the learned counsel for the appellant in W.A. No. 1099 of 2014 that one question has not been covered by the earlier orders passed by the learned single Judge, we are not inclined to accept the same for the reason that the expert body, on an analysis, found that the answer given by the appellant in W.A. No. 1099 of 2014 was not a correct one. It is settled law that while exercising the discretionary and extraordinary power under Article 226 of The Constitution of India, this Court cannot act like an expert body by replacing the assessment made by experts."

(v) The learned Additional Advocate General appearing for the third



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respondent also placed reliance on the orders of this Court viz., (1) *Priya N vs.*

The Secretary to Government in WP (MD) No. 2527 of 2015 (2) Order dated 21.02.2022 passed in the case of Sumathi vs. The Chairman, TRB in WP No. 3063 of 2022 and (3) Order dated 25.10.2016 made in WP No. 4682 of 2015 in the case of S. Jayalakshmi vs. TRB, to contend that when the final key answers have been examined and thoroughly scrutinised by an expert body constituted by the third respondent, the correctness of such opinion need not be subjected to judicial scrutiny. When the experts have zeroed in on a particular answer as the correct answer to disputed question No.26, interference of this Court is not warranted in directing the respondents to award one more mark to the appellant. The learned Additional Advocate General also submitted that the Government of Tamil Nadu has issued G.O. (Ms) No.149, School Education (TRB) dated 20.07.2018 introducing a competitive examination for selection and appointment to the post of B.T. Assistants from among the TET passed candidates. Challenging the said Government Order, writ petitions were filed and they were dismissed by this Court. Thus, when the appellant did not secure the pass mark in the TET examination, she is ineligible to participate in the competitive examination. In such view of the matter, if the appellant is awarded one more mark as prayed for in the writ petition, the respondents will have to act contrary to the



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notification issued for recruitment to the post and against the policy decision taken by the Government. Therefore, the learned Additional Advocate General prayed for dismissing this appeal.

9. We have heard the learned counsel for the parties and also perused the materials placed on record.

10. At the outset, it must be stated that this appeal is confined only in respect of awarding of one mark to the appellant for question No.26 in the TET examination conducted on 11.02.2023. Question No.26 and the answers set by the respondents are noted below:-

Question No.26. Which one of the following is not a part of teaching?

- Answer No.1: Providing true knowledge
- Answer No.2: Creating situation of learning
- Answer No.3: Adjustment environment
- Answer No.4: Coaching and Training.

11. According to the appellant, she has written the answer to question No.26 as A3 and it is correct. In other words, the answer - A4 - "Coaching and Training" may not be the correct answer to the question and it is one of the processes involved in teaching. It is her further contention that the respondents have zeroed in on answer No.4 which says "coaching and training". When



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coaching and training are *per se* integral part of teaching, therefore, question No.4 may not be the correct answer. However, the respondents as well as the experts have zeroed in on answer No.4 as the correct answer and it calls for interference by this Court.

12. We find considerable force in the submissions of the learned counsel for the appellant. It is true that the respondents have constituted an expert committee and the committee had concluded that 15 questions in 11 sessions asked in the competitive examination are not correct and recommended for change of the key answers. However, insofar as question No.26 is concerned, the experts have opined that answer No.4 is correct and not answer No.3, which was written by the appellant.

13. It is well settled that this Court has no expertise to examine the correctness or otherwise of the answers set by the respondents. For this purpose, an expert committee was constituted. However, the expert opinion need not be relied on as a gospel truth by this Court. This is more so that the appellant placed heavy reliance on the approved text book (Tamilnadu Open University - B.Ed. - Second Year - Science Teaching - Part II). It is needless to mention that the book has been approved by the Tamil Nadu Open



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University and the candidates, including the appellant, who appeared for the competitive examination must have relied on the same. On going through the question No.26, we feel that the third option (A3) is the correct answer and it was written by the appellant. This is also fortified from the approved text book relied on by the appellant. Even otherwise, the question No.26 is a negative question as to whether which one of the following is not a part of teaching. For such question, answer No.3, in our opinion, will be more appropriate and has a nexus to the question. While so, merely because the experts have opined the correct answer as A4, we need not blindly accept it knowing fully well that it is wrong and dismiss the appeal of the appellant.

14. It is well settled position of law that the Courts should be slow in interfering with expert opinion in academic matters. However, there is no embargo for the Courts to disregard the opinion of the experts, if it is demonstrated that the opinion so rendered may not be correct and unreliable. In this regard, in the decision of the Honourable Supreme Court reported in **Kanpur University** case mentioned *supra*, it was held that judicial review cannot be totally ousted in certain circumstances where it was established that the answer set by the respondents is palpably wrong. In this case, on perusal of question No.26 and the four choice of answers given thereto, we are of the



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view that answer No.3 written by the appellant will be more appropriate and it is also supported by the approved text book. While so, we see no reason to reject the contentions urged on behalf of the appellant to award one more mark to her for Question No.26. Thus, on the strength of the approved text book produced by the appellant, we are of the definite and clear view that the answer to the question No.26 is A3 which was correctly written by the appellant. Therefore, the appellant is entitled to one more mark for question no.26.

15. In the result, the writ appeal is allowed by setting aside the order dated 23.11.2023 passed in WP No. 33050 of 2023. The respondents are directed to award one more mark to the appellant for question No.26 and consequently declare her as having passed the TET examination held on 11.02.2023. No costs. Consequently, connected miscellaneous petitions are closed.

[R.M.D., A.C.J.]

[M.S.Q., J]

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Index : Yes / No

Internet : Yes / No

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1. The State of Tamil Nadu

rep. by its Principal Secretary to Government

School Education Department

<https://www.mhc.tn.gov.in/>



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THE HON'BLE ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE
and
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