

Supreme Court of India

M.R. Gupta vs Union Of India & Ors on 21 August, 1995

Equivalent citations: 1996 AIR 669, 1995 SCC (5) 628

Author: J S Verma

Bench: Verma, Jagdish Saran (J)

PETITIONER:

M.R. GUPTA

Vs.

RESPONDENT:

UNION OF INDIA & ORS.

DATE OF JUDGMENT 21/08/1995

BENCH:

VERMA, JAGDISH SARAN (J)

BENCH:

VERMA, JAGDISH SARAN (J)

VENKATASWAMI K. (J)

CITATION:

1996 AIR 669

1995 SCC (5) 628

1995 SCALE (5) 29

ACT:

HEADNOTE:

JUDGMENT:

JUDGMENT VERMA. J.

Leave granted.

The only question for decision is : Whether the impugned judgment of the Tribunal dismissing as time barred the application made by the appellant for proper fixation of his pay is contrary to law? Only a few facts are material for deciding this point.

The appellant joined the service of the State of Punjab as Demonstrator in the Government Polytechnic in 1967. Thereafter, he joined service in the railways in 1978. The appellant claimed that the fixation of his pay on his joining service in the railways was incorrect and that he was entitled to fixation of his pay after adding one increment to the pay which he would have drawn on 1.8.1978 in accordance with Rule No. 2018 (N.R.S.N. 6447) equivalent to Fundamental Rule 22-c. The

representation of the appellant to this effect was rejected before coming into force of the Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985. The appellant then filed an application on 4.9.1989 before the Tribunal praying inter alia for proper fixation of his initial pay with effect from 1.8.1978 and certain consequential benefits. The application was contested by the respondents on the ground that it was time barred since the cause of action had arisen at the time of the initial fixation of his pay in 1978 or latest on rejection of his representation before coming into force of the Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985. The subsequent representations made by the appellant for proper fixation of his pay were alleged to be immaterial for this purpose.

The Tribunal has upheld the respondents' objection based on the ground of limitation. It has been held that the appellant had been expressly told by the order dated 12.8.1985 and by another letter dated 7.3.1987 that his pay had been correctly fixed so that he should have assailed that order at that time "which was one time action". The Tribunal held that the raising of this matter after lapse of 11 years since the initial pay fixation in 1978 was hopelessly barred by time. Accordingly, the application was dismissed as time barred without going into the merits of the appellant's claim for proper pay fixation.

Having heard both sides, we are satisfied that the Tribunal has missed the real point and overlooked the crux of the matter. The appellant's grievance that his pay fixation was not in accordance with the rules, was the assertion of a continuing wrong against him which gave rise to a recurring cause of action each time he was paid a salary which was not computed in accordance with the rules. So long as the appellant is in service, a fresh cause of action arises every month when he is paid his monthly salary on the basis of a wrong computation made contrary to rules. It is no doubt true that if the appellant's claim is found correct on merits, he would be entitled to be paid according to the properly fixed pay scale in the future and the question of limitation would arise for recovery of the arrears for the past period. In other words, the appellant's claim, if any, for recovery of arrears calculated on the basis of difference in the pay which has become time barred would not be recoverable, but he would be entitled to proper fixation of his pay in accordance with rules and to cessation of a continuing wrong if on merits his claim is justified. Similarly, any other consequential relief claimed by him, such as, promotion etc. would also be subject to the defence of laches etc. to disentitle him to those reliefs. The pay fixation can be made only on the basis of the situation existing on 1.8.1978 without taking into account any other consequential relief which may be barred by his laches and the bar of limitation. It is to this limited extent of proper pay fixation the application cannot be treated as time barred since it is based on a recurring cause of action.

The Tribunal misdirected itself when it treated the appellant's claim as 'one time action' meaning thereby that it was not a continuing wrong based on a recurring cause of action. The claim to be paid the correct salary computed on the basis of proper pay fixation, is a right which subsists during the entire tenure of service and can be exercised at the time of each payment of the salary when the employee is entitled to salary computed correctly in accordance with the rules. This right of a Government servant to be paid the correct salary throughout his tenure according to computation made in accordance with rules, is akin to the right of redemption which is an incident of a subsisting mortgage and subsists so long as the mortgage itself subsists, unless the equity of redemption is extinguished. It is settled that the right of redemption is of this kind. (See Thota China Subba Rao

and Others vs. Mattapalli Raju and Others, AIR 1950 Federal Court 1).

Learned counsel for the respondents placed strong reliance on the decision of this Court in S.S. Rathore vs. State of Madhya Pradesh, [1989] Supp. 1 SCR 43. That decision has no application in the present case. That was a case of termination of service and, therefore, a case of one time action, unlike the claim for payment of correct salary according to the rules throughout the service giving rise to a fresh cause of action each time the salary was incorrectly computed and paid. No further consideration of that decision is required to indicate its inapplicability in the present case.

For the aforesaid reasons, this appeal has to be allowed. We make it clear that the merits of the appellant's claim have to be examined and the only point concluded by this decision is the one decided above. The question of limitation with regard to the consequential and other reliefs including the arrears, if any, has to be considered and decided in accordance with law in due course by the Tribunal. The matter is remitted to the Tribunal for consideration of the application and its decision afresh on merits in accordance with law. No costs.