

Supreme Court of India

State Of Karnataka & Ors vs V.B. Hiregowdar on 19 July, 1996

Equivalent citations: 1996 SCALE (5)673

Author: A Anand

Bench: Anand, A.S. (J)

PETITIONER:

STATE OF KARNATAKA & ORS.

Vs.

RESPONDENT:

V.B. HIREGOWDAR

DATE OF JUDGMENT: 19/07/1996

BENCH:

ANAND, A.S. (J)

BENCH:

ANAND, A.S. (J)

THOMAS K.T. (J)

CITATION:

1996 SCALE (5)673

ACT:

HEADNOTE:

JUDGMENT:

O R D E R Special leave granted.

The respondent who was serving as an officer of the Government of Karnataka in the Department of Child Development in Bid District in the year 1982-83 faced disciplinary inquiry on charges of certain irregularities in the release of Government funds. The Inquiry Officer, who conducted the inquiry found the respondent guilty of the charges framed against him. The disciplinary authority accepted the report of the Inquiry Officer and by its order dated 10th April, 1990 imposed penalty of reduction in rank upon the respondent. The respondent approached the Karnataka Administrative Tribunal and challenged the order of the disciplinary authority. On 28th August, 1990 the Tribunal dismissed the application on merits holding the order of the disciplinary authority to be valid. After dismissal of the application, the respondent filed a review application before the Tribunal wherein he contended that the ground urged by him regarding non-furnishing of the inquiry report, which had vitiated the punishment imposed upon him, was not considered by the Tribunal while disposing of the Original Application on 28th August, 1990. the review application was allowed on 11th

November, 1991 and the order dated 28th August, 1990 was recalled. the application was put up for fresh hearing., By its order dated 18th November, 1992, the Tribunal relying upon the judgment in Union of India Vs. Mohd. Ramzan Khan [(1991) 1 SCC, 588] allowed the Original Application holding that the order of punishment stood vitiated on account of non supply of the copy of the report of the Enquiry Officer to the applicant. It is that order which has been put in issue in this appeal.

From a perusal of the record we find that the attention of the Tribunal was drawn by the appellant to the observations in Union of India and Others vs. Mohd. Ramzan Khan (supra) to the effect that the judgment in the said case would have only prospective application. The appellant also brought to the notice of the Tribunal another judgment of this Court in Rangaswamaiah's case (Civil Appeal No. 4220 of 1992 disposed of on 12th October, 1992) wherein this Court had clarified that the judgment delivered in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) was of prospective application and was not to apply to cases where disciplinary authority had imposed punishment on the delinquent employee earlier to 20th November, 1990, the date on which the judgment in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) was delivered. The Tribunal, however, "declined" to apply the said ruling and instead relied upon an order of this Court in State of Karnataka and another VS Dr. M.Sathyanarayana Shetty dismissing the Special Leave Petition on 13th May, 1992. The Tribunal observed that since the Special Leave Petition against the judgment of the Karnataka High Court in Dr.M. Sathyanarayana Shetty's case (supra) had been dismissed, it followed that the non-furnishing of copy of the inquiry report vitiated the punishment imposed by the disciplinary authority. The Tribunal apparently failed to take into consideration that this Court in Dr M. Sathyanarayan Shetty's case (supra) did not specifically deal with the question whether the judgment in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) was to operate retrospectively or prospectively. The Tribunal it appears to us laboured hard to grant relief to the respondent ignoring the law laid down in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) itself as also in Rangaswamaiah's case (supra). The approach adopted by the Tribunal, to say the least, was improper.

The rule laid down in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) on 20th November, 1990 that non-furnishing of the copy of the inquiry report to a delinquent employee would render the final order void is only applicable prospectively after the date of the decision in Ramzan Khan's case (supra). Hence, no order of punishment passed on a delinquent employee before 20th November 1990 is challengeable on the basis of the judgment in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) and proceedings in such cases are to be decided on the basis of the law as it existed prior to the decision in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) except in cases where the service rules themselves provide for supply of copy of the report of the Inquiry Officer to the delinquent employee before imposing punishment.

A Constitution Bench of this Court in Managing Director ECIL, Hyderabad and others Vs. B. Karunakar and Others [(1993) 4 SCC 727] while affirming the judgment in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) has set the controversy at rest and categorically laid down that the judgment in Ramzan Kham' case (supra) is of prospective application only and that no order of punishment made before 20th November, 1990 was to be tested on the basis of the law laid down in Ramzan Khan's case (supra).

In the instant case, the order of the disciplinary authority punishing the respondent was passed on 10th April, 1990, much before the date of judgment in Ramzan Khan's case was delivered. The law laid down in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) the therefore, had no application to the fact situation in the present case. The order of the Tribunal, therefore, cannot be sustained since it applied the law laid down in Ramzan Khan's case (supra) retrospectively.

Consequently, this appeal succeeds and is allowed The impugned order of the Karnataka Administrative Tribunal is hereby set aside. Since, the respondent inspite of being served twice has chosen to remain absent, there will be no order as to costs.