

R. Amutha Vs The Superintending Engineer, Electricity Distribution Circle and The Chief Engineer (Personnel), Tamil Nadu Electricity Board

Court: Madras High Court

Date of Decision: Dec. 6, 2013

Hon'ble Judges: R. Sudhakar, J; Pushpa Sathyanarayana, J

Bench: Division Bench

Advocate: V. Vijay Shankar, for the Appellant; P.R. Dilip Kumar, for RR 1 and 2, for the Respondent

Final Decision: Allowed

Judgement

@JUDGMENTTAG-ORDER

Pushpa Sathyanarayana, J.

The Petitioner has filed this Writ Petition seeking to quash the proceedings of the First

Respondent/Superintending Engineer passed in M. No. 678/Adm.III/A.2/F.Suspension/2013 dated 31.5.2013 and Memorandum No.

Adm.III/A.2/F.dkt/2013 dated 31.5.2013 and for a consequential direction to the Respondents to grant Full Pension, DCRG, Earned Leave

Encashment, Half Pay Leave and Security Fund Balance and all other admissible terminal benefits. The short facts that are necessary for disposal

of this Writ Petition are as follows:-

The case of the Petitioner is that she belongs to Konda Reddi Community, which is a Scheduled Tribe as per the Presidential list and she has

obtained a Community Certificate as early as in the year 1981. It is stated that several of her relatives including her sister also possess the

Community Certificate issued by the Tahsildar and other Revenue Authorities certifying them as belonging to the said Community. The Petitioner is

said to have joined service as an Assessor in the Respondent Tamil Nadu Electricity Board, which was subsequently changed as Tamil Nadu

Generation and Distribution Corporation Limited (TANGEDCO), [for short, Respondent Corporation"] and later on, she was given Selection

Grade and also Special Grade. She was last serving as Special Grade Assessor, Dadagapatty. It is stated that during February 1986, the

Collector, Trichy, had sent a report to the Respondent Corporation, viz., her employer, that she did not belong to Konda Reddi community.

According to the Petitioner, she was not afforded an opportunity before passing the above order and, therefore, she filed a Writ Petition in W.P.

No. 7620 of 1988 which was disposed of finally on 15.4.1997 setting aside the order, however, granting liberty to the Collector to conduct the

verification afresh. The relevant passage of the order of this Court reads as under:-

The impugned order merely states a conclusion without setting out any reason. Learned Government Advocate has not been able to produce any

records to show that a proper enquiry had been conducted and that the documents had been properly considered. The impugned order, therefore,

is set aside reserving liberty to the respondents to hold a fresh enquiry in accordance with law, if so advised.

2. Despite the opportunity granted by this Court, to the Respondents to verify and conduct an enquiry, the Respondents have been sluggish and

never did any enquiry. The Petitioner also had not received any notice or date of enquiry from the State Level Scrutiny Committee or from any

Revenue Authority. While so, the Petitioner has reached her superannuation on 31.5.2013. On the last day of her service, she was issued orders

stating that she was placed under suspension and was not allowed to retire on the ground that her Community Certificate is still under verification.

Further, the Petitioner's service was extended from the date of her superannuation in the impugned order and the relevant passage is extracted

hereunder:-

During the period of Suspension the said Thirumathy. R. Amutha Special Grade Assessor, Dadagapatty Section will be paid amount equal to

provisional Pension as she was under extension of Service beyond the date of her superannuation i.e. 31.05.2013 as per rule 17(f) TANGEDCO

Service regulation till the finalization of the issue. It is the said order that is now being challenged in this Writ Petition.

3. The Respondent Corporation has denied all the averments set out in the affidavit and stated that the Petitioner belonged to Reddiyar Community

and not to Konda Reddi Community as claimed by her. The Respondent Corporation had further contended that the suspension is under Clause

17(f) of the TANGEDCO Service Regulations as the enquiry against the Petitioner is still pending. It was further stated that the employees who

were suspended on the date of superannuation, will not be entitled to receive the terminal benefits as per the working instructions format

communicated vide Memo No. 12311/A18/A181/2002-1 dated 20.3.2002. The Respondent Corporation further alleged that only on the basis of

the order in W.P. No. 7610 of 1988, the Petitioner was allowed to continue in service and as directed therein, the District authorities have

forwarded the report of the bogus Community Certificate obtained by the Petitioner only during May 2013. Therefore, the Respondent

Corporation justified the action of keeping the Petitioner under suspension.

4. It is seen from the above facts that though this Court had directed the District Collector and the Revenue Authorities to conduct an enquiry

about the community of the Petitioner way back in 1997, the Respondent had not taken any action till May 2013 when the Petitioner was about to

retire. The Respondent Corporation has not given any reason in the counter for not approaching the District Level Vigilance Committee from the

year 1997, to verify the genuineness of the Community Certificate issued to the Petitioner. After the passage of 16 years, at the fag end of service,

by order dated 31.5.2013, the Petitioner has been suspended on an allegation that she produced bogus Community Certificate. It is a fact that the

Petitioner obtained the Community Certificate as early as in 1981. But, till the date of her superannuation, the Certificate has not been cancelled as

per law. When the District Collector attempted to take action against her, this Court quashed the same stating that no opportunity was afforded to

the Petitioner, however, opportunity was granted to the Respondents as well as the Revenue authorities to approach the District Level Vigilance

Committee. It is to be seen that the petitioner's Community Certificate remains valid and subsisting as the same has not been cancelled so far as

stated in R. Kandasamy Vs. Chief Engineer, Madras Port Trust, .

4. On a doubt being raised regarding the validity of certificates issued by the Tahsildar prior to 11.11.89, the Joint Secretary to the Government of

Tamil Nadu on 3.04.1991 informed the Collectors of various districts in Tamil Nadu that ""the Permanent Community Certificate issued to

Scheduled Tribes by Tahsildars up 11.11.89 is valid"". This communication had been placed on record in the High Court. From a combined

reading of G.O.M.S. No. 2137 dated 11.11.89 and letter of the Joint Secretary dated 3.04.1991 (supra) it follows that whereas a Community

Certificate after 11.11.89 is required to be issued by the Revenue Divisional Officer, but the Community Certificates issued by the Tahsildar prior

to 11.11.89 are valid certificates. In view of this position, it was not proper for the respondent to have insisted upon a fresh certificate to be

produced by the appellant from the Revenue Divisional Officer as admittedly the Community Certificate produced by the appellant had been issued

by the Tahsildar concerned in 1987, that is, prior to 11.11.89.

5. It is to be seen that as per the terms and conditions of the rules and regulations governing the employees working in the TANGEDCO, the

payment of pension and other terminal benefits will be automatic for an employee on attaining the age of superannuation and the Respondent

Corporation has got no power to withhold the grant of pension or other terminal benefits. The Respondents, despite the permission granted by this

Court to approach the Vigilance Committee to enquire into the matter, having slept over the same for more than 16 years, cannot be allowed to

take advantage of their own wrong at the fag end of her service. The State Level Scrutiny Committee also had sufficient time to make verification.

However, not even a preliminary enquiry has been made in this case. In the circumstances, for the failure and inaction on the part of the

Respondents, the Petitioner cannot be made to suffer and be denied of benefits. The action of the respondent is, therefore, arbitrary in nature.

6. For all the above reasons, we hold that the impugned order suffers from illegality and arbitrariness. Whenever the employer finds that a

Community Certificate produced by an employee is not genuine, action should be taken promptly with the competent authority to cancel such

Certificate. It is only on such cancellation, the employer gets a right to initiate disciplinary action on the ground that the Community Certificate is not

a valid one. This exercise has not been followed in the present case. The impugned order of suspension cannot be allowed to stand for the reasons

set out above. Accordingly, the order of suspension dated 31.5.2013 passed in M. No. 678/Adm.III/A.2/F.Suspension/2013 is quashed and the

Writ Petition is allowed. No costs. In view of the setting aside of the impugned order, the petitioner is deemed to have been relieved from service

as on the date of her superannuation, i.e., 31.5.2013. The authorities are further directed to grant Full Pension, DCRG, Earned Leave Encashment,

half Pay Leave and Security Fund Balance and all other admissible terminal benefits, to the petitioner as prayed for. However, we make it clear

that this order will not stand in the way of the Respondent Corporation from making a reference to the District Collector concerned for necessary

enquiry and report. In view of the disposal of the main writ petition, connected Miscellaneous Petition is closed. The respondent Board is directed

to comply with the above order within 8 weeks from the date of the receipt of the copy of this order.