IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT ALLAHABAD SITTING AT LUCKNOW

Neutral Citation No. - 2024:AHC-LKO:59271-DB

A.F.R.

RESERVED

Judgment Reserved on: 21.08.2024 Judgment Delivered on: 30.08.2024

Court No. - 2

Case: - WRIT - A No. - 2440 of 2022

Petitioner :- Shobh Nath Singh

Respondent :- State Of U.P.Thru.Chief Secy.Lko.And Another

Counsel for Petitioner: Shivam Sharma, Dileep Kumar Yadav, Manoj Kumar Mishra, Sunil Kumar Srivastava Counsel for Respondent: C.S.C., Gaurav Mehrotra

Hon'ble Rajan Roy J. Hon'ble Subhash Vidyarthi J.

(Per: Subhash Vidyarthi, J.)

- 1. Heard Shri Manoj Kumar Mishra, and Shri Shivam Sharma, the learned counsels for the petitioner, learned Standing Counsel appearing for the respondent No.1-State of U.P. and Shri Gaurav Mehrotra, the learned counsel appearing for the respondent No.2-High Court of Judicature at Allahabad.
- 2. By means of the instant writ petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, the petitioner has challenged validity of an Office Memorandum dated 29.11.2021 issued by the State Government, whereby the petitioner has been retired prematurely. The petitioner has also challenged the validity of the recommendation for his compulsory retirement made by the High court, which was communicated through a letter dated 26.11.2021.
- 3. Briefly stated, facts of the case are that the petitioner was appointed as an Additional Munsif in U.P. Judicial Services in the year 2003. In the year 2008, he was promoted to a post of Civil Judge (Senior Division). In the year 2010-2011, he was given adverse

remarks in his Annual Confidential Report and his integrity was not certified as there were oral complaints against him regarding dishonesty and corruption. The petitioner was placed under suspension vide order dated 04.10.2013. A disciplinary inquiry was instituted against him and in the inquiry report dated 11.02.2014, he was exonerated of all the charges. Accordingly, the petitioner was reinstated in service by means of an order dated 16.04.2014 with full salary and allowances for the period of suspension.

- 4. The petitioner submitted a representation against the adverse remarks made in the Annual Confidential Report for the year 2009-10 and 2010-11, which were rejected. The petitioner filed Writ-A No.40376 of 2016 before this Court sitting at Allahabad challenging the adverse remarks made in his Annual Confidential Report and the said writ petition is still pending.
- 5. On 22.03.2017, the petitioner was appointed as Secretary, District Legal Services Authority, Mahoba. On 17.06.2017, the petitioner submitted a representation to the Registrar General of this Court stating that the District Judge was depriving him of the facilities to which he was entitled and that he was being neglected by the District Judge. He further stated in the aforesaid representation that he is suffering from Diabetes and some eye disease for the past 10 years due to which his vision was being affected and he had to undergo a surgical operation in P.G.I., Lucknow in October, 2016. By the aforesaid representation dated 17.06.2017, the petitioner had requested that he be transferred to some other district.
- 6. Thereafter, the District Judge again made some adverse remarks against the petitioner in the Annual Confidential Report for the period 2017-18 wherein the District Judge remarked that the petitioner's integrity is doubtful. For the year 2018-19 also, the District Judge remarked that the petitioner's integrity is doubtful and several other adverse remarks were made against the petitioner.
- 7. On the basis of the aforesaid Annual Confidential Report, a departmental inquiry was set-up against the petitioner and he was

placed under suspension by means of an order dated 01.04.2019. A charge-sheet was issued to him on 22.07.2019. An inquiry report was submitted on 10.07.2020, whereby the petitioner was exonerated of all the charges.

- 8. A vigilance inquiry was also instituted against the petitioner and in the report submitted by the Special Officer (Vigilance) of this Court, it was found that the petitioner indulged in non-cooperative activities by not organizing legal literacy camps in the month of June, 2017 and that he indulged in an act of indiscipline by not receiving a D.O. letter issued by the District and Session Judge and by using reckless and derogatory language against the District and Session Judge, Mahoba in his explanation submitted to the latter. The Administrative Committee of the High Court issued a warning to the petitioner to remain vigilant in future and the matter was dropped.
- 9. On 14.09.2020, the petitioner submitted a representation against the Annual Confidential Report recorded by the Administrative Judge, Mahoba against him for the year 2017-18 to the Administrative Committee of this Court and he submitted an additional representation for the same purpose on 28.09.2020. The Administrative Committee ordered that the overall performance of the Officer for the year 2017-18 be assessed 'Average' and has found that there was nothing in the representation which may warrant interference regarding integrity recorded by the Hon'ble Administrative Judge. Thus, the petitioner's representation was partially allowed to the extent mentioned above.
- 10. Thereafter, the petitioner has been retired prematurely by means of the impugned order dated 29.11.2024 in furtherance of recommendation made by this Court.
- 11. The petitioner has himself given the following information in para-30 of the writ petition. Which reads as under:-
 - "30. That the ACR of THE last ten years, the adverse remarks for three years, and the disciplinary proceeding for the years in which the adverse ACRs have been made are reproduced herein in a tabulated form as follows:-

Status of Enquiry	Year	Overall Assessment of the petitioner in the ACR	Remarks about integrity
N/A	2009-10	Average	Integrity is certified
Disciplinary Enquiry was initiated wherein petitioner was exonerated upon the basis report of enquiry dated 11.02.2014 in D.E. No.23/2013 N/A	2010-11	Average	Integrity is not certified
N/A	2011-12	Good	Integrity is certified
N/A	2012-13	Good	Integrity is certified
N/A	2013-14	Good	Integrity is certified
N/A	2014-15	Good	Integrity is certified
N/A	2015-16	Good	Integrity is certified
N/A	2016-17	Average	Integrity is certified
Vigilance Enquiry was initiated against the petitioner wherein upon the basis of enquiry report dated 19.11.2019 in V.B. Enquiry No.06/2019, the petitioner was absolved from the charges and was warned to be vigilant in future by the administrative committee of the Hon'ble High Court of Judicature at Allahabad.	2017-18	Average	Doubtful
Disciplinary Enquiry was initiated upon the similar allegations as mentioned in the ACR of year 2018-19 wherein the petitioner was exonerated upon the basis of enquiry report dated 10.07.2020 in D.E. No. 04/2019/Cf(A).	2018-19	Average	Doubtful

12. The respondent No.2 – the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad has filed a counter affidavit and a copy of the relevant

excerpts of minutes of the meetings of Screening Committee held on 11.06.2020 and 15.06.2020 have been annexed therewith. The Screening Committee has taken into consideration the facts that disposal of old cases by the petitioner was not satisfactory during the year 2009-2010 because 1964 civil suits were pending out of which 678 cases were old cases but the petitioner decided only 3 contested cases. Out of 224 regular execution cases, the petitioner decided only 6 contested matters and out of 16 small causes execution cases, he decided only one contested case. Some complaints were made against the petitioner by members of the Bar. The District Judge had made adverse remarks in the Annual Confidential Report for the year 2009-10 and the petitioner's representation against those remarks had been rejected by the Representation Committee as also by the Administrative Committee. In the year 2010-11, the District Judge has recorded in the Annual Confidential Report that several complaints of dishonesty and corruption had been received against the petitioner and, therefore, his integrity was not certified. His private character was also not good. He used to pass injunction orders without sufficient grounds, on pick and choose basis. He was not amenable to the advice of the District Judge. He did not enjoy a good reputation and he was troublesome in judicial administration. The petitioner's representation against the aforesaid remarks had been rejected by the Administrative Judge, who affirmed the remarks made by the District Judge.

13. In the year 2012-13, it was recorded by the District Judge that a complaint had been received against the petitioner, regarding which an inquiry was being made by the High Court. The petitioner did not decide a single execution case during the year and he has no interest in disposal of execution cases. His judgments were not sound and appreciation of evidence was not good. Disposal of work was not adequate. The petitioner had submitted his works done statement with wrong entries, regarding which a D.O. letter was issued to him but he again submitted the statement with another wrong entry. The petitioner has no control over the office. He had made only two

inspections during the year, which were not effective. There was a general complaint that he was not punctual in sitting on the dais. He was not amenable to the advice of the District Judge. His overall assessment was made as 'Average'. The District Judge rejected the petitioner's representation against the aforesaid entries. The Representation Committee also rejected the petitioner's representation finding it sans merit and it was affirmed by the Administrative Committee vide its resolution dated 03.07.2019.

- In the year 2017-2018, the District Judge remarked that the petitioner's integrity is doubtful. He was in-disciplined and non-cooperative. He was habitual of not attending the office without any information. His character adversely affects the discharge of his official duties. In his reply dated 06.07.2017, the petitioner has used reckless and defamatory language against the District Judge. His overall assessment was found to be poor.
- 15. In the year 2018-19, the District Judge has remarked that the petitioner's integrity is doubtful. He is not fair and impartial in dealing with the public and the Bar. His private character is such as lowers him in the estimation of the public and adversely affects the discharge of his official duties. In some instances, his judgments are not proper on facts and law, though some judgment are good also. His overall assessment was made as 'Average'. The District Judge further remarked that the petitioner was habitual of passing indiscreet orders on applications under Section 156(3) Cr.P.C., for which he had been warned on judicial side. The petitioner's representation made against the aforesaid adverse remarks was rejected by the Administrative Judge.
- 16. A Vigilance inquiry had been initiated against the petitioner on complaints of misconduct and on consideration of the inquiry report, the Administrative Committee of this Court has warned the petitioner to remain vigilant in future.
- 17. The Screening Committee has also taken into consideration the fact that the District Judge, Mahoba had submitted a letter dated

22.12.2018 complaining about the work, conduct and integrity of the petitioner and the then Administrative Judge, Mahoba, finding the allegations to be serious in nature, had recommended the petitioner's suspension and a vigilance inquiry was set-up against him and the Administrative Committee had placed him under suspension.

- While assailing the validity of the aforesaid order retiring the petitioner prematurely, learned counsel for the petitioner has submitted that the Screening Committee has not taken into consideration the fact that the petitioner has been exonerated of all the charges in both the departmental inquiries set-up against the petitioner and that the Committee has recommended premature retirement of the petitioner without consideration of the relevant material.
- 19. The provisions for compulsory retirement is contained in Rule 56(j) of the Fundamental Rules, which reads as under: -
 - "56(j) Notwithstanding anything contained in this rule, the Appropriate Authority shall, if it is of the opinion that it is in the public interest so to do, have the absolute right to retire any Government servant by giving him notice of not less than three months in writing or three months" pay and allowances in lieu of such notice:
 - (i) If he is, in Group A or Group B service or post in a substantive, quasi-permanent or temporary capacity and had entered Government service before attaining the age of 35 years, after he has attained the age of 50 years;
 - (ii) in any other case after he has attained the age of fifty- five years."
- 20. The submissions of the learned Counsel for the parties were heard on and judgment had been reserved on 21.08.2024. On 23.08.2024 Sri. Manoj Kumar Mishra, the learned Counsel for the petitioner has supplied written submissions alongwith a compilation of six judgments and we proceed to deal with all of those. The first judgment is in the cases of **Madan Mohan Choudhary v. State of Bihar**: (1999) 3 SCC 396 and the learned Counsel for the petitioner has referred to the following passages: -

"26. From the scheme of the Constitution, as set out above, it will be seen that though the officers of the subordinate judiciary

are basically and essentially government servants, their whole service is placed under the control of the High Court and the Governor cannot make any appointment or take any disciplinary action including action for removal or compulsory retirement unless the High Court is "CONSULTED" as required by the constitutional impact of both the Articles 233 and 234 and the "control" of the High Court indicated in Article 235.

- 27. The word "consult" in its ordinary meaning means "to ask advice" or "to take counsel". The Governor is thus a "consultor" and the High Court is the "consultee" which is treated as an expert body in all matters of service including appointments, disciplinary action, compulsory retirement etc. relating to State Judicial Services. Since the Governor cannot act on his own unless he has consulted the High Court, the Constitution has conferred upon the High Court a sacred and noble duty to give the best of advice or opinion to the Governor; an advice tendered after due deliberation and after taking into consideration all the relevant material and record relating to the problem on which consultation is made or advice is sought by the Governor. It is, therefore, essentially a matter of trust and confidence between the Governor and the High Court. The High Court cannot act arbitrarily in giving its opinion to the Governor or else it will be a betrayal of that trust. If the advice is not supportable by any material on record and is arbitrary in character, it may not have any binding value.
- 28. It has already been pointed out by this Court in Registrar, High Court of Madras v. R. Rajiah (1988) 3 SCC 211 that though the High Court, in its administrative jurisdiction, has the power to recommend compulsory retirement of a member of the Judicial Service in accordance with the Rules framed in that regard, it cannot act arbitrarily and there has to be material to come to a decision that the officer has outlived his utility. It was also pointed out in this case that the High Court while exercising its power of control over the subordinate judiciary is under a constitutional obligation to guide and protect judicial officers from being harassed or annoyed by trifling complaints relating to judicial orders so that the officers may discharge their duties honestly and independently, unconcerned by the ill-conceived or motivated complaints made by unscrupulous lawyers and litigants.
- 21. There can be no dispute against the aforesaid proposition of law and none of the principles laid down in the aforesaid case have been violated in the present case. In **Madan Mohan Choudhary** (Supra) the adverse remarks for the years 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 were not recorded in the "normal course" but were recorded "at one go"

and that too when the Standing Committee of the High Court had already formed an opinion to compulsorily retire the appellant from service. These remarks which were recorded in the character roll of the appellant "at one go" and were communicated to the appellant on 29-11-1996 were considered by the Full Court on 30-11-1996 which approved the proposal of compulsorily retiring the appellant from service. The appellant had been categorised as 'B' plus in 1990. There was no categorisation for the next three years and when the action for compulsory retirement of the appellant was initiated by the High Court on the ground that he had granted anticipatory bail in a case under Section 307 IPC, categorisation for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 was done "at one go". The Hon'ble Supreme Court found it to be unreasonable and not fair. Moreover, the compulsory retirement was ordered in 1996 and the appellant's categorisation for 1994-95 and 1995-96 was not indicated in the original service record placed before the Hon'ble Supreme Court. It is on account of these abnormalities coupled with other strange circumstances of this case that the Hon'ble Supreme Court held that the categorisation of the appellant as a 'C' Class Officer for the years 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 could not have been legally taken into consideration and the impugned action of compulsorily retiring the appellant from service was arbitrary in the sense that no reasonable person could have come to the conclusion that the appellant had outlived his utility as a judicial officer and had become dead wood which had to be chopped off. The aforesaid observations made in light of the peculiar facts of that case will not apply to the facts of the present case.

22. The learned Counsel for the petitioner has next relied upon a judgment in the case of **High Court of Punjab & Haryana v. Ishwar Chand Jain**: (1999) 4 SCC 579. In that case, the Inspecting Judge had graded the officer as "B+Good" for the year 1984-85 but the Full Court modified the same to "C-Below average". In an earlier appeal filed by the Officer, the Hon'ble Supreme Court had restored the grading of the Officer in his ACR as "B+Good", but there was no indication of this in the precis prepared by the Registry which

certainly would have misled many of the Judges of the Full Court. There was no ACR recorded for the years 1992-93, 1993-94, 1994-95 and for nine months of 1995-96 when the Full Court met on 12.12.1995. In its earlier meeting on 22.09.1995 the Full Court had it recorded ACR for the year 1991-92 grading the Officer as "C-Integrity doubtful" by relying upon an inspection report prepared by the Inspecting Judge on 25.02.1992. There was no material to justify as to why the inspection report of February 1992 was considered by the Full Court in September 1995 and why there could be no inspection from that year till holding of the Full Court meeting. Inspection note by the Inspecting Judge gives an impression that he inspected the Court of the Officer and visited the bar room before he gave his report, whereas in fact the Inspecting Judge had inspected the Court of the Officer only in March 1992. The Inspecting Judge had noted that there were some complaints which formed the subjectmatter of the disciplinary proceedings against him, which the Hon'ble Supreme Court found incorrect, as on the date of the inspection report no disciplinary proceedings were pending against the Officer. There were no particulars of the complaints whether these were in writing or oral and if these related to the judicial work performed by the officer. The Hon'ble Supreme Court found that the inspection note was certainly flawed and it could not have formed the basis for the Full Court to record that integrity of the officer was doubtful and to grade him 'C'. The Inspecting Judge had taken charge of the District only on 21.11.1991 and within three months, i.e., on 25.02.1992, he gave his inspection report. Therefore, the Hon'ble Supreme Court held that the ACR for the year 1991-92 was to be kept aside. There were only four ACRs, which were for the years 1983-84 (B-Average/Satisfactory), 1984-85 (B+Good), 1988-89 (B-Satisfactory) and 1989-90 [(B+(Good)]. On the basis of these ACRs the recommendation of the High Court could not be justified. Further, the Officer was retired while under suspension. The Hon'ble Supreme Court was of the view that the action of the High Court in retiring the Officer was based on the allegation of misconduct, which was the

subject-matter of the enquiry before a Judge of the High Court and which was the basis for recording of adverse remarks by the High Court in ACR of the officer for the year 1991-92. The order of compulsorily retiring the Officer though innocuously worded, was in fact an order of his removal from service. This case was also decided in view of the peculiar factual background of the case, which is in no way similar to the facts of the present case.

- 23. The learned Counsel for the petitioner has next relied upon a judgment in the case of **R.K. Singh v. State of U.P.**: 1991 Supp (2) SCC 126, which was an appeal directed against the order denying Selection Grade to the appellant on the ground that he had been awarded two adverse entries for the years 1980-81 and 1982-83. During the pendency of the appeal before the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the appellant's representation against the adverse entries was allowed and the entries were expunged from his service record and the State Government granted Selection Grade to the appellant with effect from the date he takes over charge. In these circumstances, the Hon'ble Supreme Court held that once the adverse entries awarded to the appellant were expunged, the appellant was entitled to Selection Grade with effect from the date on which he became eligible for grant of Selection Grade. We fail to appreciate as to how this case is relevant for adjudication of the controversy involved in the present case and we are constrained to observe that citing irrelevant judgments does not serve any purpose and it only results in wastage of the time, which the Judges could otherwise have utilized for some better purpose.
- The next judgment forming part of the compilation is of **Nand Kumar Verma v. State of Jharkhand**: (2012) 3 SCC 580, wherein the Hon'ble Supreme Court the High Court had selectively taken into consideration the service record for certain years only. There were discrepancies in the ACRs relied upon by the High Court and the copies of the ACRs which had been provided to the Officer by the High Court under the Right to Information Act, 2005. From a

comparison of the two, the Hon'ble Supreme Court concluded that the High Court had not faithfully extracted the contents of the ACRs. This case was also decided keeping in view the peculiar facts of the matter, which are in no manner similar to the facts of the present case.

- 25. The next judgment placed in the compilation is **State of Gujarat v. Umedbhai M. Patel**, AIR 2001 SC 1109 = (2001) 3 SCC
 314. In that case, the Hon'ble Supreme Court summarized the law relating to compulsory retirement in the following words: -
 - "(i) Whenever the services of a public servant are no longer useful to the general administration, the officer can be compulsorily retired for the sake of public interest.
 - (ii) Ordinarily, the order of compulsory retirement is not to be treated as a punishment coming under Article 311 of the Constitution.
 - (iii) For better administration, it is necessary to chop off dead wood, but the order of compulsory retirement can be passed after having due regard to the entire service record of the officer. (iv) Any adverse entries made in the confidential record shall be
 - (iv) Any adverse entries made in the confidential record shall be taken note of and be given due weightage in passing such order.
 - (v) Even uncommunicated entries in the confidential record can also be taken into consideration.
 - (vi) The order of compulsory retirement shall not be passed as a short cut to avoid departmental enquiry when such course is more desirable.
 - (vii) If the officer was given a promotion despite adverse entries made in the confidential record, that is a fact in favour of the officer.
 - (viii) Compulsory retirement shall not be imposed as a punitive measure.
- 26. In **Umedbhai M. Patel** (Supra), there were absolutely no adverse entries in the respondent's confidential record. He had successfully crossed the efficiency bar at the age of 50 as well as at 55. He was placed under suspension on 22.05.1986 pending disciplinary proceedings. The enquiry was not completed within a reasonable time and without waiting for conclusion of the enquiry, the authorities decided to dispense with the services of the respondent merely on the basis of the allegations which had not been proved. Even the Review Committee did not recommend the compulsory retirement of the respondent. The respondent had only less than two years to retire from service. The High Court had quashed the order of compulsory retirement and the Hon'ble Supreme Court affirmed the order of the

- High Court holding that in the absence of any adverse entries in his service record to support the order of compulsory retirement, the order of compulsory retirement was passed for extraneous reasons.
- 27. The last judgment placed in the compilation is a judgment rendered by a coordinate Bench of this Court in the case of Avinash Chandra Tripathi Vs. State of U.P. and Ors.: 2018 (7) ADJ 582, in which the Bench found that the entire service record of the petitioner was unblemished, the Administrative Committee had decided to drop action on the basis of the vigilance enquiry report and the enquiry report in the disciplinary proceeding the petitioner against were not found proved. There was nothing on record to suggest that the general reputation of the petitioner was tainted or not good. In view of these facts, this Court found that the order of compulsory retirement had been passed without appreciating the material on record correctly and properly, and consequently, we the order of compulsory retirement was quashed. In the present case, the Screening Committee has considered the service record of the petitioner for the years 2009-10 to 2018-19 and it is not that his service record was unblemished.
- While dealing with a challenge made to an order of compulsory retirement of a Judicial Officer, the Hon'ble Supreme Court held in Ram Murti Yadav v. State of U.P. and Another: (2020) 1 SCC 801, that:-
 - "14. It has to be kept in mind that a person seeking justice, has the first exposure to the justice delivery system at the level of subordinate judiciary, and thus a sense of injustice can have serious repercussions not only on that individual but can have its fall out in the society as well. It is therefore absolutely necessary that the ordinary litigant must have complete faith at this level and no impression can be afforded to be given to a litigant which may even create a perception to the contrary as the consequences can be very damaging. The standard or yardstick for judging the conduct of the judicial officer therefore has necessarily to be strict. Having said so, we must also observe that it is not every inadvertent flaw or error that will make a judicial officer culpable. The State Judicial Academies undoubtedly has a stellar role to perform in this regard. A bona fide error may need correction and counseling. But a conduct which creates a perception beyond the ordinary

cannot be countenanced. For a trained legal mind, a judicial order speaks for itself."

(Emphasis added)

- 29. The Hon'ble Supreme Court further held in **Ram Murti Yadav** (Supra) that: -
 - "6....The scope for judicial review of an order of compulsory retirement based on the subjective satisfaction of the employer is extremely narrow and restricted. Only if it is found to be based on arbitrary or capricious grounds, vitiated by malafides, overlooks relevant materials, could there be limited scope for interference. The court, in judicial review, cannot sit in judgment over the same as an Appellate Authority. Principles of natural justice have no application in a case of compulsory retirement."
- 30. When we examine the facts of the present case in light of the law laid down in the cases mentioned above, we find that there have been several complaints of corruption and dishonesty against the petitioner ranging from the years 2009-10 to 2018-19. The overall assessment of the petitioner has been made as 'Average' for five years during the aforesaid period. His integrity has not been certified for the year 2010-11 and it has been found to be doubtful for the year 2017-18 and the year 2018-19. Although the Screening Committee has also recorded that the petitioner was placed under suspension and an inquiry was set-up against him, the mere non-mention of petitioner's exoneration in disciplinary inquiry would not affect the legality of the order to retire the petitioner prematurely as had the petitioner been found guilty in the inquiry, proceedings would have been initiated for his punishment. Compulsory retirement is not a punishment and an employee is retired compulsorily only when no case for his punishment is made out, but when keeping in view his overall performance, it is found that he is not suitable for being continued in service, although he is not guilty of any misconduct calling for his punishment.
- 31. In the present case, the Screening Committee has recommended compulsory retirement of the petitioner keeping in view his overall service record for the period 2009-10 to 2018-19, which has been

referred to in the earlier part of this judgment. There appears to be no illegality committed in making a recommendation for the petitioner's compulsory retirement and in acceptance of the recommendation by

the State Government by passing an order for the petitioner's

premature compulsory retirement.

The writ petition lacks merit and the same is hereby *dismissed*. 32.

(Subhash Vidyarthi J.) (Rajan Roy J.)

Order Date: 30.08.2024

-Amit K-