Reserved

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL, JABALPUR BENCH JABALPUR

Original Application No.200/00812/2011

Jabalpur, this Friday, the 13th day of September, 2019

HON'BLE SHRI NAVIN TANDON, ADMINISTRATIVE MEMBER
HON'BLE SHRI RAMESH SINGH THAKUR, JUDICIAL MEMBER

R.K. Hadau
S/o Late Shri K.C. Hadau
DOB 8.6.1973
C/o Shri Kundlik Roa Adlak
Behind Awasthi Complex
College Road
Civil Lines Betul (M.P.) 460001 **-Applicant**

(By Advocate **–Shri S.K. Nandy**)

V e r s u s

1. Union of India,
Through its Secretary
Ministry of Communication & IT
Department of Posts, Dak Bhawan
Sansad Marg New Delhi 110001

2. Chief Post Master General
M.P. Circle Hoshangabad Road
Bhopal 462012 (M.P.)

3. Director Postal Services
Bhopal Division Bhopal 462012 (M.P.)

4. Superintendent of Post Offices
Chhindwara Division
Chhindwara (M.P.) 480001 - **Respondents**

(By Advocate **–Shri S.K. Mishra**)

(Date of reserving the order:16.01.2019)

O R D E R

By Navin Tandon, AM:-

The applicant is aggrieved by imposition of punishment for recovery of Rs.2,69,462/- on the basis of a minor penalty charge sheet.

2. The applicant has prayed for the following reliefs:-

> *"8(i) Summon the entire relevant record from the respondents for its kind perusal;*
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> *(ii) Set aside the order dated 30.11.2010 Annexure A/1 and dated 11.8.2011 Annexure A/2 with all consequential benefits arising thereto.*
>
> *(iii) Command the respondents to refund the recovered amount to the applicant along with interest;*
>
> *(iv) Any other order/orders, direction/directions may also be passed.*
>
> *(v) Award cost of the litigation to the applicant"*

3. Brief facts of the case are that the applicant is working with the Postal department. He was served with a minor penalty charge sheet dated 28.10.2010 (Annexure A/3). The applicant submitted his representation dated 20.11.2010 (Annexure A/4). Subsequently, the disciplinary

authority vide order dated 30.11.2010 (Annexure A/1) has imposed the penalty of recovery of Rs.2,69,426/-. The applicant has submitted his appeal dated 04.01.2011 (Annexure A/5) to the appellate authority but the same was rejected on 11.08.2011 (Annexure A/2).

4. Learned counsel for the applicant has brought our attention to the order dated 14.08.2018 passed by this Tribunal in O.A. No.534 of 2011 (***Y.N. Shripad*** vs. ***Union of India and others***) wherein recovery has been set aside. The relevant portions are as under:-

> *"9. Learned counsel for the applicant has relied upon the decision of the Hon'ble High Court of Madhya Pradesh in the maters of* ***Union of India and others*** *vs.* ***Ajay Agrawal,*** *M.P. No. 1798 of 2017, decided on 02.01.2018.*
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> *10. We have also carefully gone through the facts of the instant case as well as the decision of the Hon'ble High Court in the matters of* ***Ajay Agrawal*** *(supra), relevant paragraphs of the said order read thus:*
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> > *"A Division Bench of this Court in Union of India and Anr. Vs. C.P. Singh [2004 (2) MPJR 252] had an occasion to examine the issue as to whether an inquiry can be dispensed with, in all cases where the penalty purposed is recovery of pecuniary loss caused by*

negligence or breach of orders categorized as minor penalty? Their lordships taking note of decisions in C.R. Warrier Vs. State of Kerala (1983 (1) SLR 608), V. Srinivasa Rao Vs. Shyamsunder (ILR 1989 Ker. 3455); G. Sundaram Vs. General Manager, Disciplinary Authority, Canara Bank (ILR 1998 Kar. 4005); O.K. Bhardwaj Vs. Union of India and others [(2001) 9 SCC 180] and Food Corporation of India Vs. A. Prahalada Rao [(2001) 1 SCC 165] were pleased to observe:

"(16) The position as can be gathered from the Rules and the aforesaid decisions can be summarized thus:

(i) In a summary inquiry, a show cause notice is issued informing the employee about the proposal to take disciplinary action against him and of the imputations of misconduct or misbehavior on which such action is proposed to be taken. The employee is given an opportunity of making a representation against the proposal. The Disciplinary Authority considers the records and the representation and records of findings on each of the imputations of misconduct.

(ii) In a regular inquiry, the Disciplinary Authority draws up the articles of charge and it is served on the employee with a statement of imputation of misconduct, list of witnesses and list of documents relied on by the Department. The Disciplinary Authority calls upon the employee to submit his defence in writing. On considering the defence; the Disciplinary Authority considers the same

and decides whether the inquiry should be proceeded with, or the charges are to be dropped. If he decides to proceed with the enquiry, normally an Inquiring Authority is appointed unless he decides to hold the inquiry himself. A Presenting Officer is appointed to present the case. The employee is permitted to take the assistance of a co-employee or others as provided in the rules. An inquiry is held where the evidence is recorded in the presence of the employee. The employee is permitted to inspect the documents relied upon by the employer. The employee is also permitted to call for other documents in the possession of the Management which are in his favour. The delinquent employee is given an opportunity to rebut the evidence of the management by cross-examining the management witnesses and by producing his evidence both documentary and oral. Arguments-written and/or oral-are received/heard. The delinquent employee is given full opportunity to put forth his case. Therefore, the Inquiring Authority submits his report. The copy of the report is furnished to the employee and his representation is received. Thereafter the Disciplinary Authority considers all the material and passes appropriate orders. The detailed procedure for such inquiries is contained in sub-rules (6) to (25) of Rule 9 of the Railway Servants (Discipline & Appeal) Rules, 1968 corresponding to sub-rules (3) to (23) of Rule 14 of the Central' Civil Services

(CCA) Rules, 1965 and M.R Civil Services (CCA) Rules, 1966.

(iii) The normal rule, except where the employee admits guilt, is to hold a regular inquiry. But where the penalty proposed is a 'minor penalty', then the Rules give the Disciplinary Authority a discretion to dispense with a regular inquiry for reasons to be recorded by him, and hold only a summary enquiry.

(iv) Though the Rules contemplate imposing a minor penalty without holding a regular enquiry, where the Disciplinary Authority is of the opinion that such enquiry is not necessary, such decision not to hold an enquiry can be only for valid reasons, recorded in writing. Dispensation with a regular enquiry where minor penalty is proposed, should be in cases which do not in the very nature of things require an enquiry, for example, (a) cases of unauthorised absence where absence is admitted but some explanation is given for the absence; (b) non-compliance with or breach of lawful orders of official superiors where such breach is admitted but it is contended that it is not willful breach; (c) where the nature of charge is so simple that it can easily be inferred from undisputed or admitted documents; or (d) where it is not practicable to hold a regular enquiry.

(v) But, even where the penalty proposed is categorised as minor penalty, if the

penalty involves withholding increments of pay which is likely to affect adversely the amount of pension (or special contribution to provident fund payable to the employee), or withholding increments of pay for a period exceeding three year or withholding increments of pay with cumulative effect for any period, then it is incumbent upon the disciplinary authority to hold a regular inquiry.

(vi) ***Position before decision in FCI****:*

Where the charges are factual and the charges are denied by the employee or when the employee requests for an inquiry or an opportunity to put forth the case, the discretion of the Disciplinary Authority is virtually taken away and it is imperative to hold a regular inquiry.

Position after decision in FCI:

Where the Rules give a discretion to the Disciplinary Authority to either hold a summary enquiry or regular enquiry, it is not possible to say that the Disciplinary Authority should direct only a regular enquiry, when an employee denies the charge or requests for an inquiry. Even in such cases, the Disciplinary Authority has the discretion to decide, for reasons to be recorded, whether a regular enquiry should be held or not. If he decides not to hold a regular enquiry and proceeds to decide the matter summarily, the employee can always challenge the minor punishment imposed, on the ground that

the decision not to hold a regular enquiry was an arbitrary decision. In that event, the Court or Tribunal will in exercise of power of judicial review, examine whether the decision of the Disciplinary Authority not to hold an enquiry was arbitrary. If the Court/Tribunal holds that the decision was arbitrary, then such decision not to hold an enquiry and the consequential imposition of punishment will be quashed. If the Court/Tribunal holds that the decision was not arbitrary, then the imposition of minor penalty will stand.

(17). It is also possible to read the decisions in Bharadwaj and FCI harmoniously, if Bharadwaj is read as stating a general principle, without reference to any specific rules, that it is incumbent upon the Disciplinary Authority to hold a regular enquiry, even for imposing a minor penalty, if the charge is factual and the charge is denied by the employee. On the other hand, the decision in FCI holding that the Disciplinary Authority has the discretion to dispense with a regular enquiry, even where the charge is factual and the employee denies the charge, is with reference to the specific provisions of a Rule vesting such discretion.

(18). There is yet another aspect which requires to be noticed. Where the penalty to be imposed though termed as minor, is likely to materially affect the employee either financially or career-wise then it is not possible to dispense with a regular enquiry. In fact, this is evident from sub-rule (2) of Rule-11 which says

that where the penalty to be imposed, though termed as minor penalty, involves withholding of increments which is likely to affect adversely the amount of pension or special contribution to provident fund, or withholding of increments of pay for a period exceeding three years or withholding of increments of pay with cumulative effect, then an enquiry as contemplated under Rule-9 (6) to (25) is a must. Thus, categorisation of penalties into 'major' and 'minor' penalties, by itself may not really be determinative of the question whether a regular enquiry is required or not.

(19). While 'censure' and withholding of increments of pay for specified period may conveniently be termed as minor punishments, we feel very uncomfortable with 'recovery of pecuniary loss, for negligence or breach of 'orders' without stipulating a ceiling, being considered as a 'minor penalty'. 'Recovering small amounts, as reimbursement of loss caused to the employer byway of negligence or breach of orders from the pay of the employee can be a minor penalty. But can recovery of huge amounts running into thousands and lakhs, by way of loss sustained on account of negligence or breach of orders, be called as a minor penalty ? For example, in this case, recovery sought to be made from the petitioner is Rs. 75,525/- determined as being 50% of the total value of 74 rail posts. Theoretically, what would be the position if the loss was 740 or 7400 rail posts.? Does it mean that recovery of Rs. 7.5 lakhs or Rs. 75 lakhs can be ordered from the Government servant, still terming it as a minor penalty, without holding any enquiry ? It is time that the State and authorities take a

second look as what is termed as 'minor penalty' with reference to recovery of losses. The recovery of pecuniary loss on account of negligence or breach of order though termed as a minor penalty may have disastrous consequences, affecting the livelihood of the employee, if the amount sought to be recovered is huge.

(20). In the absence of any ceiling as to the pecuniary loss that can be recovered by treating it as minor penalty, it is necessary to find out whether there is any indication of the limit of amount that can be recovered without enquiry, by applying the procedure for imposition of minor penalties. We get some indication of the pecuniary limit in Rule-11 (2) which provides that if the minor penalty involves withholding of increments of pay for a period exceeding three years then a regular enquiry is necessary. Thus, we can safely assume that the pecuniary loss proposed to be recovered exceeds the monetary equivalent of increments for a period of three years, then a regular enquiry has to be held.

(21). The fastening of pecuniary liability on the basis of negligence or breach of orders, involves decision on four relevant aspects:

(a) What was the duty of the employee?

(b) Whether there was any negligence or breach of order on the part of the employee while performing such duties?

(c) Whether the negligence or breach of order has resulted in any financial loss to the employer?

(d) What is the quantum of pecuniary loss and whether the pecuniary loss claimed include any remote damage and whether the employer has taken steps to mitigate the loss?

These are not matters that could be decided without evidence, and without giving an opportunity to the employee to let in evidence. Therefore, where the charge of negligence or breach of lawful order is denied, a regular enquiry is absolutely necessary before fastening financial liability on the employee, by way of punishment of recovery of pecuniary loss from the employees. However, having regard to the decision in FCI, regular inquiry can be dispensed with, for valid reasons, if the amount to be recovered is small (which in the absence of a specific provision, does not exceed the equivalent of three years increment at the time of imposition of penalty). Any attempt to fasten any higher monetary liability on an employee without a regular enquiry, by terming it as a minor penalty, would be a travesty of justice."

Careful reading of these decisions and applying the principle of law in the facts of present case leaves no iota of doubt that the disciplinary authority acted arbitrarily in dispensing from holding a regular departmental enquiry for no

recorded reasons. Or even if there were reasons the same were not communicated. The impugned order when tested on the anvil of above analysis cannot be faulted with as would warrant an indulgence. Consequently, petitions fail and are dismissed. However no costs."

5. In the instant Original Application, we find that penalty of recovery of Rs. 2,69,426/- has been imposed upon the applicant without conducting any departmental enquiry. This amount exceeds the monetary equivalent of increments for a period of three years. Thus, the present case is fully governed by the said decision of Hon'ble High Court of Madhya Pradesh in the matters of ***Ajay Agrawal*** (Supra).

6. Learned counsel for the respondents submits that in case the Tribunal is deciding that the penalty order is to be set aside, then as per the judgment of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Chairman Life Insurance Corporation of India and Others*** vs. ***A. Masilamani*** (2013) 6 SCC 530, and ***Managing Director, ECIL, Hyderabad and others vs. B.Karunakar and others*** (1993) 4 SCC 727 the case should be remanded to the

disciplinary authority for taking further necessary action in the matter.

7. Hon'ble Apex Court in ***Masilamani*** (supra) has held thus:-

> ***"15.*** *In view of the issues raised by the learned counsel for the parties, the following questions arise for our consideration:*
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> ***15.1.*** *When a court/tribunal sets aside the order of punishment imposed in a disciplinary proceeding on technical grounds i.e. non-observance of statutory provisions, or for violation of the principles of natural justice, then whether the superior court, must provide opportunity to the disciplinary authority to take up and complete the proceedings from the point that they stood vitiated; and*
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> ***15.2.*** *If the answer to Question 1 is that such fresh opportunity should be given, then whether the same may be denied on the ground of delay in initiation, or in conclusion of the said disciplinary proceedings.*
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> ***16.*** *It is a settled legal proposition, that once the court sets aside an order of punishment, on the ground that the enquiry was not properly conducted, the court cannot reinstate the employee. It must remit the case concerned to the disciplinary authority for it to conduct the enquiry from the point that it stood vitiated, and conclude the same. (Vide ECIL v. B. Karunakar [(1993) 4 SCC 727 : 1993 SCC (L&S) 1184 : (1993) 25 ATC 704 : AIR 1994 SC 1074] , Hiran Mayee Bhattacharyya v. S.M. School for Girls [(2002) 10 SCC 293 : 2003 SCC (L&S) 1033] , U.P. State Spg. Co. Ltd. v. R.S. Pandey [(2005) 8 SCC 264 : 2006 SCC (L&S) 78] and Union of*

India v. Y.S. Sadhu [(2008) 12 SCC 30 : (2009) 1 SCC (L&S) 126] .)."

7.1 In the matter of ***B.Karunakar*** (supra), Hon'ble Supreme Court held that:-

"31.....Where after following the above procedure, the Court/Tribunal sets aside the order of punishment, the proper relief that should be granted is to direct reinstatement of the employee with liberty to the authority/management to proceed with the inquiry, by placing the employee under suspension and continuing the inquiry from the stage of furnishing him with the report. The question whether the employee would be entitled to the back-wages and other benefits from the date of his dismissal to the date of his reinstatement if ultimately ordered, should invariably be left to be decided by the authority concerned according to law, after the culmination of the proceedings and depending on the final outcome. If the employee succeeds in the fresh inquiry and is directed to be reinstated, the authority should be at liberty to decide according to law how it will treat the period from the date of dismissal till the reinstatement and to what benefits, if any and the extent of the benefits, he will be entitled. The reinstatement made as a result of the setting aside of the inquiry for failure to furnish the report, should be treated as a reinstatement for the purpose of holding the fresh inquiry from the stage of furnishing the report and no more, where such fresh inquiry is held. That will also be the correct position in law."

8. Taking the same ratio, we are in agreement with the averment of the learned counsel for the respondents that in

case the penalty order is set aside, the case should be remanded back to the disciplinary authority for taking appropriate action.

9. Accordingly, the present Original Application is allowed. The impugned order dated 30.11.2010 (Annexure A/1 and 11.08.2011 (Annexure A/2) are quashed and set aside. In this view we do not deem it appropriate to consider other grounds as narrated in the Original Application. The case is remanded back to the disciplinary authority for passing a reasoned order as per rules. Respondents are directed to refund the amount so recovered from the applicant within a period of 60 days from the date of communication of this order. However the applicant shall not be entitled for any interest on the said amount. No costs.

(Ramesh Singh Thakur) **(Navin Tandon)**
Judicial Member **Administrative Member**

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