

P. Chitharanja Menon and Others

Vs

A. Balakrishnan and Others

Civil Appeal No. 1547 of 1975

(CJI M. H. Beg, A. C. Gupta, P. S. Kailasam JJ)

25.04.1977

JUDGMENT

KAILASAM, J. –

1. This appeal is by special leave granted by this Court against the judgment of the High Court of Kerala in O.P. 5566 of 1972 by respondents 4 to 8 and 13 before the High Court.
2. The respondents herein filed the writ petition for the issue of the Writ of Certiorari calling for records relating to Ex. P-10, GO Rt. 3386/69/DD dated October 23, 1969, Ex. P-12 and Ex. P-15 and quash the same and to issue a writ of mandamus directing the respondents 1 and 2 who are the State of Kerala represented by the Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala, and the Director of Panchayats to forbear the implementation of Ex. P-12 and further direct them to implement Ex. P-8 grading list or in the alternative to issue a writ of mandamus directing the State of Kerala to consider and dispose of Ex. P-13 and similar representations by respondents 3 and 4 on merits. It was also prayed that a writ of certiorari quashing Ex. P-17 in so far as it related to the petitioners and respondents 3 to 18 in the writ petition be issued and also to issue a writ of mandamus compelling the respondents 1 and 2, State of Kerala and the Director of Panchayats, to assign the writ petitioners the appropriate ranks in the cadre of Executive Officers in the Panchayat Services. The High Court allowed the writ petition and set aside the list Ex. P-17, the order Ex. P-12 and the order Ex. P-1 dismissing the appeal petition Ex. P-14 and directed that a fresh list be prepared in accordance with the principles laid down in Ex. P-16 in the light of the judgment of the High court. Aggrieved by the decision of the High Court the appellants have preferred this appeal.
3. The writ petition was contested by 18 respondents. Respondents 3 to 10 were Panchayat Executive Officers of the Malabar area functioning under the Madras Village Panchayat Act, 1951, on December 31, 1961. Respondents 11 to 18 were Panchayat Officers functioning as such on December 31, 1961 under the Travancore-Cochin Panchayats Act, 1950. The Kerala Panchayats Act, 1960 Act 32 of 1960, received the assent of the Governor on December 8, 1960, and was published in Kerala Gazette Extraordinary 119 dated December 9, 1960. It is common ground that the respondents became Government servants on and from January 1, 1962. On May 15, 1961, under Ex. P-1 the Government passed an order that all Panchayat Officers/Executive Officers who continue to hold their appointments at the time when the Act came into force will be absorbed as Panchayat Executive Officers in the new Panchayats. The same order provided that the staff of the Malabar District Board shall be absorbed as Panchayat Executive Officers in suitable grades according to their qualifications, grades and suitability.
4. In December, 1961, 17 Panchayat Officers were to be appointed on a scale of pay higher than the

scale applicable to the Panchayat Executive Officers. The Public Service Commission selected 17 Panchayat Executive Officers who were on the scale of pay Rs. 80-150 and drew up a list on December 27, 1961. They were appointed as Panchayat Inspectors under Ex. P-8 on December 28, 1961. To fill up these vacancies 17 of the Panchayat Executive Officers who were in Grade II on the scale of pay Rs. 40-120, the respondents 3 to 18 were appointed. The 5 appellants before us were appointed as Executive Officers on the grade I Rs. 80-150 as and from January 1, 1962.

5. The respondents who were the petitioners in the writ petition were integrated in the service. The Government passed orders laying down the principles of integration of the District Board employees and the Panchayat Executive Officers and Panchayat Officers. The impugned orders under the writ petition are Ex. P-10, Ex. P-12 and Ex. P-15. It is also prayed the Ex. P-17 may be quashed. The Government in Ex. P-10 came to the conclusion that the vacancies on the advice of the Public Service Commission and the appointment of those that had been advised on December 28, 1961, arose only on the dates enumerated in the order Ex. P-10 commencing from December 30, 1961, and ending with January 2, 1962 and that the appointment can only be on occurrence of the vacancies. We do not see on what basis Ex. P-10 could be challenged. Ex. P-10 refers to G. O. MS 93/62 dated February 13, 1962. By the G. O. of 1962, 16 respondents in the writ petition were promoted as Executive Officers Grade I on the advice of the Public Service Commission. The promotion of the respondents in the writ petition having been ordered as early as February 13, 1962, without challenging that order a subsequent order which determined the date of their commencement of service cannot be challenged. In fact, the respondents were appointed to the higher posts on December 28, 1961, and they took charge on December 30, 1961, January 1, 1962 and January 2, 1962. The respondents in this petition were integrated into the service only on January 1, 1962. Their position in the service was to be determined by the Government later. If the respondents were aggrieved at the posting to the higher post of the present appellants and others they ought to have even challenged promotion which was made on January 1, 1962. Not having questioned the legality of the promotion or the G. O. of 1962 it is too late for them to question the validity of the G. O. of 1969 by filing a writ petition in the year 1972.

6. Apart from this insurmountable objection even on merits the respondents have no claim. The Government passed Ex. R-1 dated January 31, 1965, laying down the principles of integration of the District Board employees and the Panchayat Executive Officers and Panchayat Officers. It provided that the integration must be based on functional parity. Ex. P-12 is a G. O. dated May 5, 1970. The G. O. refers to the earlier G. Os. dated February 13, 1962, and June 24, 1969, and states that the names of the 17 Executive Officers, the appellants and others, are given rank under Executive Officers Grade I as on January 6, 1962. The gradation list is P-17 dated July 22, 1972. After referring to the earlier G. Os. the Director of Panchayats approved a final gradation list of Executive Officers of Panchayats as on January 6, 1962. The appellants are ranked as 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, etc. The respondents made representations against Ex. P-12 but these representations were not accepted and a list Ex. P-8 was drawn up. The respondents again objected to the list and subsequently Ex. P-12 was prepared. Objections (P-14) were raised to Ex. P-12 but they were rejected by order Ex. P-15 and final list Ex. P-17 was published in accordance with the suggestions made in Ex. P-12.

7. The contention on behalf of the respondents is that the order under Ex. P-12 is against the position taken by the Government in Exs. P-10 and P-10(a) and the Director had no authority to prepare a list in contravention of Exs. P-10 and P-10(a). Ex. P-12 was challenged on the ground that it is not in accordance with Ex. P-16 which settled the principles to govern the integration. It was therefore submitted that Ex. P-12 and P-17 must be quashed. Strong reliance was placed on the order of the Government dated May 15, 1961, which while it provided that Panchayat

Officers/Executive Officers who continue to hold their appointments at the time when the Act comes into force will be absorbed as Panchayat Executive Officers in the new Panchayat Executive Officers in the new Panchayats, secured the right of the staff of the District Board by providing that the staff of the Malabar District Board shall be absorbed as Panchayat Executive Officers in suitable grades according to their qualifications, grades and suitability. On the basis of the principle of integration above cited it was submitted that if the vacancies in which the appellants and other Panchayat Executive Officers were observed arose after January 1, 1962, the respondents would be entitled to be integrated along with the Panchayat Executive Officers and as they were drawing the same pay they ought to have been given an equal ranking. We have already pointed out that these appointments were made before December 31, 1961, and as such the respondents cannot have any claim. The appointments of the appellants and other Panchayat Executive Officers were made before December 31, 1961, and as the integration was to take effect from January 1, 1962, they cannot have any grievance. Further, it will be seen from G. O. MS 97/67/A and RDD dated March 18, 1967, which refers to absorption of various categories of staff of the defunct Malabar District Board in the Department of Local Bodies, it is stated in paragraph 3 that while 9 U. D. Clerks will be equated to the posts of Panchayat Executive Officers, 2nd grade, 21 Lower Division Clerks and 8 Revenue Inspectors and 4 clerical attenders will be equated to the posts of the Panchayat Executive Officers 3rd grade. It is stated that respondents 1 to 4 come under this category and are only 3rd Grade Executive Officers. It will thus be seen that the respondents were not equated with the appellants and other Panchayat Executive Officers when they were integrated from the District Board service.

8. The persons similarly situated as the respondent herein who were integrated from the District Board services filed writ petitions before the High Court impleading the present appellants challenging the gradation and failed in their attempt. The earliest petition is in O. P. 1431 of 1970. Justice Isaac who heard the petition observed that the petitioners came in the integrated service as 3rd Grade Executive Officers and were promoted to 2nd Grade with effect from February 6, 1968, while respondents 3 to 10 (some of whom are appellants before us) have been promoted as early as February 16, 1962, as 1st grade officers. The learned Judge further observed, "Even ignoring this, respondents 3 to 10 were I Grade Executive Officers from February 16, 1962, while the Petitioner has become even II Grade Executive Officer only with effect from February 6, 1966". As the petitioners before the learned Judge was holding a post much inferior to the posts held by respondents 3 to 10 from February 1, 1962, onwards, he dismissed the petition being devoid of any merit on May 24, 1972. Another writ petition O. P. 6423 filed by one of the persons integrated from the District Board Services, against the present appellants and others was also dismissed by Justice Isaac on June 27, 1973. A writ appeal filed against the order of Justice Isaac in O. P. 1431 of 1970 was summarily dismissed by the Bench of the Kerala High Court.

9. While the earlier judgments were all decided against the respondents, the Kerala High Court in the judgment under appeal took a different view. The decision under appeal proceeds on the basis that a regrettable mistake crept into the judgment in O. P. 1431 of 1970 and the earlier decision proceeded on the basis that there was a II Grade mentioned in G. O. 814 dated November 17, 1962. The High Court was of the view that there was a III Grade under the G. O. above referred to, the earlier decision missed the fact that these grades were not applicable on January 1, 1962. Though G. O. 814 of 1962 was not placed before us we are not sure whether there was any mistake in the earlier judgment for the G. O. MS 97/67 dated March 18, 1967, refers to persons being transferred from the Malabar District Board as Panchayat Executive Officers III Grade. Be that as it may, we are satisfied that the respondents are not entitled to the reliefs prayed for by them in the writ petitions. As the appellants were promoted to a higher post before the respondents were integrated

into the Government service on January 1, 1962. Further, throughout the appellants have been treated as occupying a higher post and respondents much lower post. Though the promotion of the appellants was before January 1, 1962, and was confirmed by various orders of the Government the respondents herein did not choose to challenge the orders till the year 1974. In the circumstances, we are satisfied that the orders of the Kerala High Court has to be set aside and the appeal is allowed with costs.

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