

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

B. Basavaraj

Vs.

M. Sadiq Ali

(A Anand, R Lahoti and N S Hegde JJ.)

16.12.1999

ORDER

1. Leave granted.

2. The two appellants, Rajesh Kumar and Harbir Singh appeared in the AIME Group 'B' examination conducted by the respondent-Institute of Engineers (India) on June 1, 1990. Their center was at Tagore School, Karnal. No case of copying or any malpractice was ever noticed or reported by the supervisory staff attending the examination. Somewhere in October 1990, the two appellants along with (sic) 11 other examinees received identical notices from the respondent-Institute seeking their explanation on the allegations of copying and malpractices mentioned therein. The contents of the notice were that the examinees evaluating the answer books of the examinees had reported that 13 examinees had resorted to copying in as much as their answers to some of the questions in the examination were exactly the same and that on that basis it was thought that the examinees had adopted unfair means. The two appellants submitted their replies to the allegations stating that similarity in the answer books could be as a result of the preparation from the same text books as available in the market and that the question of copying could not arise as would be evident from the sitting plan of the examinees. Further, it was stated that none of them was close to another and all were in different rooms. The paper in question was known as 'Quantity, Surveying and Valuation' - Second R. The plea of the examinees was negated by the Institute and each examinee was conveyed that his results for the examination of the year 1990 stood cancelled and further debarring him from appearing in the two immediately following examinations of the Institute i.e. upto the summer of the year 1991, for adopting unfair means and malpractices.

3. Aggrieved, the two appellants joining one Kuldip Raj put to challenge the order of the Institute-respondent by means of Civil Writ Petition No. 4259 of 1991 in the Punjab and Haryana High Court

which when placed before a Division Bench of that Court, was permitted to be withdrawn on November 19, 1991 with permission to file a civil suit. Thereupon, those three writ petitioners approached the Civil Court seeking to annul the offending communication and for mandatory injunction requiring the Institute to declare their results. The Institute contested the suit. Requisite issues were framed. On consideration of the pleadings and the evidences led by the parties, the trial Court decreed the suit holding that the non-speaking order of the Institute, bereft of any reason, and the conclusion that the plaintiffs were guilty of unfair means, was without any basis. Direction was given to the Institute to declare the results of the plaintiffs. The first appellate Court in appeal at the instance of the Institute reversed the judgment and decree of the trial Court dismissing the quit in holding that when the plaintiffs had appeared in the subsequent examinations after the period when their disqualification was over, no purpose would be served in decreeing the suit.

4. In second appeal before the High Court, the plaintiffs emerged successful for they were able to convince the learned Single Judge of that Court about the prejudice caused to their case when the answer books pertaining to the plaintiffs, as placed before the learned Single Judge, had not been put to the plaintiffs in the inquiry and secondly their sitting pattern/plan was such that the question of copying could never arise. Lastly, it was submitted that an extraneous factor had crept in the decision making process regarding the plaintiffs having appeared in examinations subsequent to the period of disqualification, without any basis as it was claimed that none of the plaintiffs had ever sat in any subsequent examination. In this situation, the High Court allowed the appeal, set aside the decree passed by the first appellate Court below directing the Institute to re-decide the matter after affording an adequate opportunity of hearing to the plaintiffs disclosing to them the material which was against them and to consider their plea. The Institute was further directed to pass a detailed speaking order in accordance with law.

5. When the matter was thus taken by the Institute in compliance with the orders of the learned Single Judge, companion writ petitioner. The latter seemingly did not avail of the opportunity but the two appellants did. They appeared of Calcutta and attempted to satisfy the Institute about the doubts raised. The Institute surprisingly took a somersault in putting aside all the material, which was expected to be used against the appellants; material which was relevant to the examination such as answer books and the sitting plan etc. the ability of the appellant, which is evident from the identical orders passed in relation to both the appellants, extracted below:

The candidate informed that he consulted the book "Estimating and Costing" by Prof R.N. Dutta for the purpose of preparation. The book was obtained from the Library of the Institution at the Headquarters and the members of Examination Disciplinary Committee and the Secretary & Director General scrutinised the answers written by the candidate in his answer book with reference to the said book and observed that substantial portion of the answers written by the candidate were exactly the same as the text printed in the book. The candidate was asked to take time to read any small paragraph from the book and cram it for identical reproduction in presence of the Secretary & Director General to justify his claim of exact reproduction of text of the said book for various answers during the Examination. The candidate failed to comply with the request."

The Institute further observed as follows: The members of EDC and the SDC and the SDG also observed, that report of adoption of similar malpractices by as many as 13 candidates, including this candidate of the same center in the same subject was received from the Examiner and the EDC, after the scrutiny of the cases, individually awarded the same punishment debarring all of them to appear upto Summer 1991 Examinations. All, except this candidate and two others, had accepted the

decision of the Institution.

6. The afore communication was put to challenge by the two appellants before the Punjab and Haryana High Court through Writ Petition No. 9699 of 1996. This time, the Division Bench of the High Court, without referring to the mandate and the parameters of the inquiry laid by the learned Single Judge, given in the decision in the regular second appeal, dismissed the writ petition in limine on 10.7.96 holding that the procedure adopted by the Institute could not be termed as arbitrary or unfair warranting interference by that Court. This order is put to challenge in this appeal.

7. The resume of the afore detailed facts gives a clear insight to the minds of the members of the Institute who sat in judgment on the fate of the appellants. The doubts as expressed by the learned Single Judge of the High Court in the Regular Second Appeal pertaining to the material available and the sitting pattern and also that the appellants had never sat in the subsequent examinations after the period of disqualifications was over, were conveniently disregarded by the Institute. It would, in these circumstances, be not wrong to assume that had the members of the Institute gone into brings with that material, the result would have gone in favour of the appellants. Conveniently, other facts were brought in replacement to conquer the field in as much as the appellants were put to a cramming test, there and then in order to judge their capability of memory retention in a matters of minutes. All literate men have been students at a given point of time but all have not been crammers. Those who cram do not achieve their goal by a single reading. It is a ceaseless effort for days and days till the desired result is achieved. Crammers inter se do not have any nexus with each other. The text of a book as the common source for cramming establishes no connection. That perse cannot be evidence of any conspiracy between the crammers to adopt unfair means in the examination unless there be material to show that there was copying of the answer books, descended from the answer book of one of the candidates, or directly from the book leading to the copying by others. The overall consideration of the Institute reflected that its members thought that they would be put to an embarrassment if the plea of the two appellants were to be accepted and therefore, thought of declining relief to the appellants. Such result cannot be permitted to follow from the deliberation of the Institute. In the interest of fair play this Court would thus step in to give a corrective dose.

8. For the afore reasons, we set aside the impugned order of the High Court and allow the appeal of the two appellants by quashing the impugned communication dated 14.12. 1990 (Annexure P-6) ordering closure of the matter in the interests of justice by holding that the orders of the Institute in cancelling the result of the appellants' examination and disqualifying them for two succeeding examinations, were in excess of jurisdiction and are therefore, quashed, ordering the respondent-Institute to declare the result of the appellants forthwith.

9. With this end results, the appeal would stand allowed with costs.