

**Court No. 1**

**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW**

**ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 468 of 2021.**

Thursday, this the 26<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2022

**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)  
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve, Member (A)”**

No. 764110-R Sgt. Pravin Kumar Dubey (Retd), S/o Shri (Late) Brahma Nand Dubey R/o House No. 61, Village-Mahadya post-Aramsarai, Dist-Mainpuri (U.P) 205262.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the: **Shri Shailendr Kumar Singh**, Advocate.  
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India, through, Secretary, MoD (IAF), South Block, New Delhi-110066.
2. Chief of Air Staff, Air Hqrs. Vayu Bhawan, New Delhi-110011.
3. Dte of Air Veterans, Air HQrs, subroto Park, New Delhi-110010.
4. PCDA (P) (Air Force) Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad (U.P)-212114.

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the  
Respondents.

: **Ms. Preeti Mala**, Advocate  
Central Govt. Counsel

**ORDER (Oral)**

1. The instant Original Application has been filed under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007 for the following reliefs :-

- (A) *To quash and set aside the respondent No.3 letter dated 21 may 2020 (annexure A-3 of OA) wherein applicant's initial claim for grant of disability element of disability pension was rejected as ineligible.*
- (B) *To issue/pass an order or directions of appropriate nature to the respondents to grant disability element of disability pension to the applicant @60% from the date of his discharge from service (01.08.2019) and to pay the arrears along with suitable rate of interest as deem fit by this Hon'ble Tribunal.*
- (C) *To grant the benefit of rounding off of the disability element of disability pension from 60% to 75% from the date of his discharge from service (01.08.2019) in terms of Govt. of India letter dated 31 Jan 2001 and to pay the arrears along with suitable rate of interest as deem fit by this Hon'ble Tribunal.*
- (D) *Any other relief as considered proper by the Hon'ble Tribunal be awarded in favour of the applicant.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force (IAF) on 16.07.1996 and was discharged from service on 31.07.2019 in low medical category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Air Force Station, Tambaram on 09.07.2019 assessed his disabilities '(i) **BIPOLAR AFFECTIVE DISORDER (OLD) F31 Z09.0 @ 40% for life** (ii) **DM TYPE II (OLD) E-ii Z09.0' @ 20% for life** (iii) **DYSLIPIDEMIA (OLD) E78 Z09.0 @ 5% for life composite disability @ 60% for life** and opined the

disabilities to be neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service. The applicant's claim for grant of disability pension was rejected vide letter dated 21.05.2020. The applicant preferred First Appeal dated 26.09.2020 which has been rejected vide order dated 06.07.2021. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present Original Application.

3. Learned Counsel for the applicant pleaded that at the time of enrolment, the applicant was found mentally and physically fit for service in the Air Force and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of enrolment in Air Force. The diseases/disabilities of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence these are attributable to and aggravated by Air Force Service. He pleaded that various Benches of Armed Forces Tribunal have granted disability element of pension in similar cases, as such the applicant be granted disability element of pension as well as arrears thereof, as applicant is also entitled to disability element of pension and its rounding off to 75%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that all the disabilities of the applicant @ 60% for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence applicant is not entitled to disability element of pension. He pleaded for dismissal of the Original Application.

5. We have heard Ld. Counsel for the applicant as also Ld. Counsel for the respondents. We have also gone through the Release Medical Board proceedings as well as the records and we find that the questions which need to be answered are of two folds:-

- (a) Whether the disabilities of the applicant are attributable to or aggravated by Air Force Service?
- (b) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the disability element of pension?

6. The law on attributability of a disability has already been settled by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Dharamvir Singh Versus Union of India & Others***, reported in (2013) 7 Supreme Court Cases 316. In this case the Apex Court took note of the provisions of the Pensions Regulations, Entitlement Rules and the General Rules of Guidance to Medical Officers to sum up the legal position emerging from the same in the following words.

*"29.1. Disability pension to be granted to an individual who is invalided from service on account of a disability which is attributable to or aggravated by military service in non-battle casualty and is assessed at 20% or over. The question whether a disability is attributable to or aggravated by military service to be determined under the Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982 of Appendix II (Regulation 173).*

*29.2. A member is to be presumed in sound physical and mental condition upon entering service if there is no note or record at the time of entrance. In the event of his subsequently being*

*discharged from service on medical grounds any deterioration in his health is to be presumed due to service [Rule 5 read with Rule 14(b)].*

*29.3. The onus of proof is not on the claimant (employee), the corollary is that onus of proof that the condition for non-entitlement is with the employer. A claimant has a right to derive benefit of any reasonable doubt and is entitled for pensionary benefit more liberally (Rule 9).*

*29.4. If a disease is accepted to have been as having arisen in service, it must also be established that the conditions of military service determined or contributed to the onset of the disease and that the conditions were due to the circumstances of duty in military service [Rule 14(c)]. [pic]*

*29.5. If no note of any disability or disease was made at the time of individual's acceptance for military service, a disease which has led to an individual's discharge or death will be deemed to have arisen in service [Rule 14(b)].*

*29.6. If medical opinion holds that the disease could not have been detected on medical examination prior to the acceptance for service and that disease will not be deemed to have arisen during service, the Medical Board is required to state the reasons [Rule 14(b)]; and 29.7. It is mandatory for the Medical Board to follow the guidelines laid down in Chapter II of the Guide to Medical Officers (Military Pensions), 2002 - "Entitlement: General Principles", including Paras 7, 8 and 9 as referred to above (para 27)."*

7. In view of the settled position of law on attributability, we find that the RMB has denied attributability to the applicant only by endorsing that the disabilities '**BIPOLAR AFFECTIVE DISORDER (OLD) F31 Z09.0** (ii) **DM TYPE II (OLD) E-ii Z09.0**' (iii) **DYSLIPIDEMIA (OLD) E78 Z09.0** are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disabilities

in Dec 2017, Dec2017 and Jul 2018 while posted in peace location i.e. at Samana and Tambaram respectively, therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability pension. However, considering the facts and circumstances of the case, we are of the opinion that this reasoning of RMB for denying disability element of pension to applicant is not convincing and doesn't reflect the complete truth on the matter. Peace stations have their own pressure of rigorous Air Force training and associated stress and strain of Air Force service. The applicant was enrolled in Indian Air Force on 16.07.1996 and the disabilities have started after more than 19 years of Air Force service i.e. in the year Dec 2017. We are, therefore, of the considered opinion that the benefit of doubt in these circumstances should be given to the applicant in view of ***Dharamvir Singh*** (supra), and the disabilities Diabetes Mellitus (old) e11Z09.0 and Dyslipidemia (old E 78Z09.0) of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by Air Force service.

8. With regard to disability Bipolar affective disorder (Old F31Z09.0) the Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Ex Cfn Narsingh Yadav vs Union of India & Ors***, Civil Appeal No 7672 of 2019, has held that mental disorders cannot be detected at the time of recruitment and their subsequent manifestation does not entitle a person for disability pension unless there are very valid reasons and strong medical evidence to dispute the opinion of Medical Board. Relevant part of the aforesaid judgment is as given below:-

*“20. In the present case, clause 14 (d), as amended in the year 1996 and reproduced above, would be applicable as entitlement to disability pension shall not be considered unless it is clearly established that the cause of such disease was adversely affected due to factors related to conditions of military service. Though, the provision of grant of disability pension is a beneficial provision but, mental disorder at the time of recruitment cannot normally be detected when a person behaves normally. Since there is a possibility of non-detection of mental disorder, therefore, it cannot be said that ‘Paranoid Schizophrenia (F 20.0)’ is presumed to be attributed to or aggravated by military service.*

*21. Though, the opinion of the Medical Board is subject to judicial review but the courts are not possessed of expertise to dispute such report unless there is strong medical evidence on record to dispute the opinion of the Medical Board. The Invaliding Medical Board has categorically held that the appellant is not fit for further service and there is no material on record to doubt the correctness of the Report of the Invaliding Medical Board.”*

9. Thus, in view of **Ex Cfn Narsingh Yadav** (supra) applicant is not entitled to disability element of pension for disability **BIPOLAR AFFECTIVE DISORDER (OLD) F31 Z09.0** being a mental disorder.

10. The law on the point of rounding off of disability pension is no more RES INTEGRA in view of Hon'ble Supreme Court judgment in the case of **Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar & ors** (Civil appeal No 418 of 2012 decided on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014). In this Judgment the Hon'ble Apex Court nodded in disapproval of the policy of the Government of India in granting the benefit of rounding off of disability pension only to the personnel who have been invalided out of service and denying the same to the personnel who have retired on attaining the age of superannuation or on completion of their tenure of engagement. The relevant portion of the decision is excerpted below:-

“4. By the present set of appeals, the appellant (s) raise the question, whether or not, an individual, who has retired on attaining the age of superannuation or on completion of his tenure of engagement, if found to be suffering from some disability which is attributable to or aggravated by the military service, is entitled to be granted the benefit of rounding off of disability pension. The appellant(s) herein would contend that, on the basis of Circular No 1(2)/97/D (Pen-C) issued by the Ministry of Defence, Government of India, dated 31.01.2001, the aforesaid benefit is made available only to an Armed Forces Personnel who is invalidated out of service, and not to any other category of Armed Forces Personnel mentioned hereinabove.

5. We have heard Learned Counsel for the parties to the lis.

6. We do not see any error in the impugned judgment (s) and order(s) and therefore, all the appeals which pertain to the concept of rounding off of the disability pension are dismissed, with no order as to costs.

7. The dismissal of these matters will be taken note of by the High Courts as well as by the Tribunals in granting appropriate relief to the pensioners before them, if any, who are getting or are entitled to the disability pension.

8. This Court grants six weeks' time from today to the appellant(s) to comply with the orders and directions passed by us.”

11. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of **Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar & Ors**, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability pension @ 25% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from three preceding years from the date of filing of the Original Application.



12. In view of the above, the Original Application No. 468 of 2021 deserves to be partly allowed, hence **partly allowed**. The impugned order dated 21.05.2020, annexed as Annexure No. 3 with Original Application, and order dated 06.07.2021 are set aside. The disabilities **DM TYPE II (OLD) E-ii Z09.0** and **DYSLIPIDEMIA (OLD) E78 Z09.0** of the applicant are held as aggravated by Air Force Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @25% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his discharge. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @ 25% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his discharge. The respondents are further directed to give effect to this order within a period of four months from the date of receipt of a certified copy of this order. Default will invite interest @ 8% per annum till the actual payment

13. No order as to costs.

14. Miscellaneous applications, pending if any, stand disposed of.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve)  
Member (A)

(Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)  
Member (J)

Dated : 26 May 2022

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