

(2026) 02 J&K CK 1647
In the Jammu And Kashmir High Court
Case No : WP(C) No.1291 Of 2024

Union of India

APPELLANT

Vs

Surinder Singh

RESPONDENT

Date of Decision : 12-02-2026

Acts Referred:

Constitution of India, 1950 — Article 226

Citation : (2026) 02 J&K CK 1647

Hon'ble Judges : Sanjeev Kumar, J;Sanjay Parihar, J

Bench : Division Bench

Advocate : Vikas Sharma

Final Decision : Dismissed

Judgement

Sanjeev Kumar, J

1. By this writ petition, filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, Union of India and others throw challenge to an order and judgment dated 22nd September, 2022 passed by the Armed Forces Tribunal, Regional Bench Srinagar at Jammu ["AFT"] in OA No.463/2019 titled Surinder Singh v. Union of India and others, whereby the AFT has allowed OA and held the respondent entitled to disability pension @ 50% as against 40%, after being rounded off. Strong reliance has been placed by the AFT on Dhahramvir Singh v. Union of India, (2013) 7 SCC 316 and Union of India v. Ram Avtar, 2014 SCC OnLine SC 1761.

2. The impugned judgment of the AFT is assailed by the petitioners on the ground that the AFT has failed to consider that the disability of the respondent had been assessed by the Release Medical Board as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service. The AFT also did not appreciate that the opinion of the Medical Board consisting of experts was not amenable to judicial review by the Court unless there was strong medical evidence on record to dispute such opinion.

3. Having heard learned counsel for the petitioners and perused the material on

record, we are of the considered opinion that the judgment passed by the AFT is perfectly legal and does not call for any interference by us in the exercise of our extraordinary writ jurisdiction.

4. The facts, which are not in dispute, are that the respondent was initially enrolled in Indian Army on 07.07.2001 in a fit state of health and discharged on 31.07.2018. Before discharge, the respondent was brought before a duly constituted Release Medical Board, which assessed the disability incurred by the respondent "Schizophrenia" @ 40% for life, however, the same has been regarded as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service. Respondent's claim for grant of disability pension was, accordingly, rejected by the petitioners. The first appeal filed by the respondent was also came to be rejected, which constrained the respondent to approach the Tribunal.

5. Feeling aggrieved, the respondent filed OA No. 463 of 2019 before the AFT seeking inter alia a direction to the petitioners herein to grant the disability element of disability pension w.e.f. 01.08.2018 @ 50% as against 40% by rounding it off. The OA was contested by the petitioners herein and in the reply affidavit filed, the stand taken was that the invaliding disease in the case of the respondent was neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service, hence he was not entitled to disability pension. It was submitted that the opinion of the Medical Board, being an expert body, was accepted and must be respected by the Courts as well.

6. The AFT having considered the OA in the light of rival contentions of the parties and having regard to the legal and factual position obtaining in the matter, held the respondent entitled to disability pension @ 40% with the benefit of rounding off to 50% for life. It is in these circumstances, the OA filed by the respondent came to be allowed.

7. This Court in a batch of writ petitions [WP(C) No. 3173/2023 a/w connected matters decided on 03.11.2025], has considered the issue with respect to the grant of disability pension to persons discharged/invalided out of service from armed forces and after considering the relevant rules, regulations and legal positions obtaining

on the issue, culled out following principles:-

i) The grant of disability pension to the army personnel is not a charity or an act of generosity but a true act of acknowledge of the sacrifices made by them during their service, which manifest in the form of diseases and disabilities. The Pension Regulations and the Entitlement Rules framed by the Government of India for providing financial benefits to the soldiers and military personnel, who encounter diseases and disabilities which are attributable to or aggravated by military service are meant to provide absolute undiluted protection and recompense for the injury that leads to loss of service and leaves such soldiers without any effective means of sustenance. The Pension Regulations and the Entitlement Rules being in the realm of welfare measures must receive liberal

interpretation and in case of any doubt or ambiguity, the interpretation must tilt in favour of the claimant/pensioner.

ii) The nature and extent of disability or cause of death falls within the domain of medical experts and, therefore, the opinion of the medical board with regard to nature and extent of disease or disability should ordinarily be accepted as final, unless there is strong medical evidence on record to dispute such opinion. And even in such cases, the judicial review would be limited to the extent of directing the army authorities to consider review medical board for examination of the claimant.

iii) That since the entitlement of a member of the force to disability pension depends largely on the opinion of the medical board, as such, it is obligatory on the medical boards to record clear and cogent reasons in support of their medical opinion. Absent such clear and cogent reasons in support of the medical opinion, it shall be presumed that the disease that afflicted the soldier during service was due to army service.

iv) Under the 1982 Entitlement Rules, there was a presumption in favour of the claimant that he was in sound physical and mental condition when he joined the service except to a specific disability noted or recorded at the time of entrance into service. In the event of his subsequently being discharged from service on medical grounds, any deterioration of his health which has taken place, is due to service (Rule-5).

v) A disease which has led to an individual's discharge or death shall ordinarily be deemed to have been arisen in service, if no note of it has been made at the time of individual's acceptance in military service. This is, however, subject to medical opinion holding, for reasons to be stated, that the disease was such as could not have been detected on medical examination prior to acceptance for service. Even if, in the circumstances aforementioned, disease is accepted as having arisen in service, the army authorities must establish that conditions of military service determined or contributed to the onset of the disease and that the conditions were due to circumstances of duty in military service. The onus of proof is not on the claimant and it is for the employer to demonstrate the conditions for non-entitlement of the claimant, for, there is a presumption in favour of the army personnel, who entered in service while being in fit physical and mental conditions and suffered from disease or disablement during service. This was the position precisely in the 1982 Entitlement Rules. However, in 2008 Entitlement Rules, there is no such presumption, yet the onus of proof is still on the employer to establish the disentitlement of the soldier to the benefit of disability pension on the prescribed grounds. It is only where claim for disability pension is lodged after 15 years, the initial onus will shift to the claimant.

vi) That notwithstanding the removal of presumption of entitlement envisaged in the 1982 Entitlement Rules, the legal position has not undergone any substantial change. An army personnel, who is accepted in army service after proper

physical and mental examination shall be deemed to possess sound physical and mental condition. The Army would not accept an individual, who is not mentally and physically fit for army service. Though, as is now provided under the 2008 Entitlement Rules, the examination at the time of entering into service shall be of general nature and would not be exhaustive to find out latent and hidden hereditary, constitutional or congenital diseases, yet any onset of such disease during service has to be certified to be so by the medical authorities supported by clear and cogent medical reasons.

vii) In terms of Rule 15 of 1982 Entitlement Rules, if onset and progress of a disease is affected by environmental factors relating to service conditions, dietic compulsion, exposure to noise, physical and mental stress and strain or is due to infection arisen in service, such disease would merit entitlement of attributability. The possibility of pre-service history of such condition as may be certified by the medical authorities may rule out entitlement of attributability but would require consideration regarding aggravation. Annexure-III to the 1982 Entitlement Rules classifies the diseases which are affected by environmental factors in service and would serve as guide to find as to whether a particular disease or disability is attributed to or aggravated by army service.

viii) However, the cases post 2008 Regulations and governed by 2008 Entitlement Rules would leave the attributability or aggravation to be determined by the medical authorities. The disease would be accepted as attributable to military service, if it has arisen during the period of military service and has been caused by the conditions of employment in military service. The diseases due to infection arisen during service, other than sexually transmitted diseases, shall be deemed to be attributable to military service. In the case of diseases where their cause is not known, there shall be presumption of entitlement in favour of the claimant that it is also attributable to military service unless such presumption is rebutted on the basis of clinical picture and current scientific medical application.

ix) A disability shall be considered aggravated by service conditions, if its onset is hastened or the subsequent course is worsened by specific conditions of military service, such as posted in places of extreme climatic conditions, environmental factors related to service conditions e.g. Fields, Operations, High Altitudes etc. This again would be subject to clear and cogent medical opinion by the competent medical authority.

x) A disease or disability shall not be held attributable to or aggravated by military service unless a causal connection between the disability or death and military service has been established by appropriate authority.

xi) That the Guide to Medical Officers (Military Pension), 1980 as amended from time to time shall be kept in mind by the medical boards and the authorities concerned to determine as to whether disability or death is due to military service i.e. either attributable to or aggravated by military service.

xii) The amendments to Chapter-VI to Guide to Medical Officer (Military

Pensions), 2008 analyze different type of diseases and lay down guidelines to determine whether a particular disease is attributable to or could be aggravated by military service. Diseases like, hypertension, diabetic mellitus, Ischaemic Heart Disease (IHD) etc etc. find mention in paragraph 43, 26 and 47 of the GMO, 2008 and serve as broad guide to determine attributability or aggravation aspects.

xiii) Burden to disprove the acceptance of causal connection between disability and the military service is on the authorities and the same cannot be said to have been discharged by any inchoate, casual, perfunctory or vague approach of the authorities. This underlines the profound significance of the requirement of recording reasons by the medical board(s).

xiv) That so long as it is established that the disability or death bears causal connection with the service condition, it is immaterial whether the cause giving rise to the disability or death occurred in an area declared to be a field service/ active service area or under normal peace condition (Regulation 423 of the Regulations for Medical Services to Armed Forces, 2010).

8. In view of the aforesaid legal position, the only question that needs determination in this case is whether opinion of the medical board, which assessed the disability incurred by the respondent as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service can be relied upon to justify the disentitlement of the army personnel to the disability element of pension in respect of his military service.

9. Before we proceed further, it needs to be taken note of that respondent-Surinder Singh having been discharged for disablement in the year 2018 is covered by 2008 Regulations read with 2008, Entitlement Rules. As provided in Rule 1(b) of 2008, Entitlement Rules, the Guide to Medical Officers (Military Pension), 2008, as amended from time to time, is required to be read with the said Rules.

10. To disentitle the respondent from claiming the disability pension, the petitioners are required to plead and demonstrate that the disability ? Schizophrenia, which led to the discharge of the respondent, though arisen during service, was neither attributable to nor aggravated by army service. The burden to prove absence of causal connection between the disability and the army was service also on the petitioners.

11. With a view to determining as to whether the petitioners have successfully discharged the burden and have by clear, unambiguous and cogent medical evidence established that the disability, which led to the invalidation of the respondent from military service is neither attributable to nor aggravated by army service, we have gone through the medical record, which is part of the paper-book. The relevant portion whereof is set out below:-

Disability

Attributable

Aggravated

Not

Reason/Cause/Specific

to service

by service

connected

condition and period

(Y/N)

(Y/N)

with

in service

service

(Y/N)

Schizophrenia

No

No

Yes

Justification attached

12. As per the medical record, which is part of the paper-book, justification is attached, however, we could not find any justification forming part of the medical record, which could justify the opinion of the medical board, which regarded the disability suffered by the respondent neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service. However, in the memo of writ petition, the petitioners have stated the reason /justification for declaring the disease suffered by the respondent as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service as "Onset being in peace area i.e. Dalhousie (HP). Therefore, it cannot be said that the petitioners have succeeded in discharging the burden to prove disentitlement on the ground of absence of causal connection between the disability and the army service.

13. ?Schizophrenia? refers to a psychiatric condition characterized by excessive suspicion, mistrust, or the false belief that others are conspiring against, persecuting, or intending harm to the individual. It may appear as part of various mental health disorders, such as paranoid schizophrenia, delusional disorder

(persecutory type), or paranoid personality disorder. It can arise from a combination of biological, psychological, and environmental factors, including Genetic and biological vulnerability, Brain, Stress and trauma etc. Exposure to severe or chronic stress, trauma or isolation due to service compulsions are the some of factors, which do have the effect of aggravation.

14. It is not in dispute that when the respondent was accepted in service he was found physically and mentally fit by the authority and, therefore, the disease "Schizophrenia", he was found suffering at the time of his discharge, occurred during service. To disentitle the respondent from claiming disability element of pension, the petitioners were required to plead and demonstrate that the disability noted by the release medical board, though, having arisen during service was neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service. The burden to prove absence of causal connection between the disability and the military service was also on the petitioners.

15. Be that as it may, we are of the considered opinion that the medical opinion rendered in the case of the respondent is vague and cryptic. Therefore, benefit of such ambiguity must be given to the respondent.

16. For all these reasons, we find no illegality or infirmity in the judgment passed by the AFT. The writ petition is, therefore, found devoid of any merit, the same is, accordingly, dismissed.