2025 INSC 1376

REPORTABLE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
CIVIL ORIGINAL JURISDICTION

WRIT PETITION (C) NO(S). 206 OF 2025

MISSION ACCESSIBILITY ....PETITIONER(S)

VERSUS

UNION OF INDIA & ORS. ....RESPONDENT(S)

J U D G M E N T

Mehta, J.

1. The measure of a just and inclusive society lies not merely in the freedoms it proclaims, but in the opportunities, it ensures for all its citizens to realize their fullest potential. Equality, in its truest sense, demands not uniformity but the removal of barriers that prevent individuals from standing on equal footing. The Constitution of India envisions a Republic where every person, regardless of physical

or sensory limitation, can participate with dignity in the nation's collective journey. The law, as an instrument of justice, must therefore move beyond formal equality to ensure substantive inclusion, transforming rights from written promises into lived realities. It is in this spirit that the present writ petition comes before this Court, seeking not privilege, but parity; not indulgence, but the rightful fulfilment of the constitutional vision of equal opportunity for all.

2. The instant writ petition has been instituted by Mission Accessibility[1], an organisation engaged in the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities, for enforcing the rights of persons with disabilities to equal opportunity guaranteed to them under the Constitution of India and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The directions

[1] Hereinafter, beingreferred to as "petitioner".

sought by way of this writ petition include, *inter alia,* the modification of the timeline for scribe registration in the Civil Services Examination conducted by Union Public Service Commission[2] and for permitting the use of laptops equipped with Screen Reader Software along with accessible digital question papers for eligible candidates. For the sake of ready reference, the reliefs sought in the writ petition are reproduced hereinbelow: -

> "In light of the facts and submissions stated hereinabove, the Petitioner humbly prays that this Hon'ble Court may graciously be pleased to issue a writ of mandamus or any other appropriate writ, order, or direction in the following terms:
> A. Declare and hold that the Impugned Requirement is arbitrary, unreasonable, and violative of Articles 14, 16 and 21 of the Constitution of India, as well as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.
> B. Direct the Respondent No. 2 to remove the mandatory requirement of furnishing scribe details at the time of application submission and instead permit visually impaired candidates to provide such details at a reasonable time closer to the examination date.
> C. Direct the Respondent No. 2 to modify the application process for the Civil Services Examination, 2025, which allows candidates with disabilities to modify their scribe details at any time

[2] Hereinafter, referred to as "respondent No. 2-UPSC".

> before any given stage of the Civil Services Examination.
> D. Direct the Respondent No. 2 to allow the use of laptops with screen readers for visually impaired candidates at all stages of the Civil Services Examination.
> E. Direct the Respondent No. 2 to provide question papers in accessible digital formats for candidates with disabilities opting for the same.
> F. Pass any other order/direction as may be deemed just and proper in the interests of justice, equity and good conscience."

3. This Court *vide* order dated 6th May, 2025 allowed the impleadment of Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) as respondent No. 3 and directed the counsel representing respondent No. 2-UPSC to have a dialogue with counsel representing respondent No. 3-DoPT regarding the apprehensions and concerns of the candidates appearing in Civil Services Examination. Learned counsel representing respondent No. 2-UPSC was also directed to file an appropriate affidavit of the competent officer with respect to the change of scribe. The said order is extracted hereinbelow: -

> "Application (I.A. No.95839 of 2025) seeking impleadment of Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) as respondent no.3 is allowed.
> Issue notice.
> Ms. Archana Pathak Dave, learned Additional Solicitor General, is requested to also appear on behalf of the DoPT and obtain necessary instructions in light of the deliberations that have taken place in Court today.
> Mr. Hrishikesh Baruah, learned counsel appearing for the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), shall obtain further instructions and have a dialogue with Ms. Archana Pathak Dave, learned ASG, regrading apprehensions and concerns of the candidates.
> Mr. Baruah shall also file an appropriate affidavit of the competent officer from the UPSC with respect to the change of scribe, to be permitted within one week.
> List the matter on 9th May, 2025."

4. In compliance of the aforesaid order, respondent No. 2-UPSC filed an affidavit stating that it has till now received requests from approximately 27 candidates being Persons with Benchmark Disability/Persons with Disability (PwBD/PwD) for change of their scribe details. Respondent No. 2-UPSC assured that it will examine each and every such request on merit and revert to the candidates. It was further stated that a press note with the said

details has been uploaded on its website after due approval emphasizing that respondent No. 2-UPSC will consider each request for change of scribe received from PwBD/PwD candidates till 18th May, 2025 (04:00 PM) on merit basis. A copy of the press note was annexed with the affidavit. However, the affidavit was completely silent in respect of the issue of providing the screen reader facility to such candidates.

5. On 9th May, 2025, when the matter came up for hearing, this Court perused the aforesaid affidavit filed by respondent No. 2-UPSC and heard submissions advanced by the parties. This Court directed that all requests for change of scribe by eligible candidates under the CSE Rules, 2025 shall be entertained by respondent No. 2-UPSC till 18th May, 2025, and each such prayer shall be objectively considered and decided by a reasoned order within

three working days from its receipt. Respondent No. 2-UPSC was further directed to file a specific affidavit clarifying its position on the use of computers with screen readers by PwBD/PwD candidates in the forthcoming preliminary examination. For ready reference, the relevant extract of the said order is reproduced hereinbelow: -

> "6. Ms. Dave, learned ASG appearing on behalf of Union of India submitted that under the general instructions for preliminary and main examinations contained in the Civil Services Examinations Rules, 2025 (for short 'CSE Rules, 2025'), certain categories of PwD candidates has been given permission to avail the facility of scribe. The candidates have the discretion of opting their own scribe or request the Commission for the same. The details of the scribe in case the candidates are bringing their own scribe or availing the same through the Commission, will be sought at the time of filling up of the online application form.
> 7. Regarding the issue of use of laptops with screen readers for visually impaired candidates, Ms. Dave has submitted that the same could be examined and a suitable decision can be taken by the Commission in consultation with the Department for PwD in light of the extant instructions issued by the Government of India on the subject. Any decision taken in the matter would not require an amendment to the CSE Rules, 2025.
> 8. Shri Bajaj has raised certain concerns about the criterion for the change of scribe as set out in the

affidavit on behalf of the Commission which are enumerated hereinbelow: -

> "Prescription of a timeline within which such requests must be disposed of. It is submitted that candidates will need to make suitable arrangements based on whether their request is allowed or disallowed. For instance, if the Commission disallows a candidate's request for change of own scribe, the said candidate will have to take steps to request the Commission for a scribe or try and persuade the previously opted for scribe to remain available on the exam date. Therefore, clarity and finality on this front is important. This Hon'ble Court may be pleased to direct that all such requests will be disposed of within a period of 3 working days.
>
> No clarity is given on the grounds on which such requests will be allowed or disallowed, thereby leaving the candidates in the dark. It is therefore prayed that requests for change of scribe should be allowed: [i] due to personal unavailability of the scribe; [ii] due to medical emergencies; or [ii] if the candidate wishes to opt for own scribe rather than the Commission's scribe. In no other circumstance should such requests be allowed.
>
> Required documentary evidence: as of now, the public notice is silent on the supporting document that needs to be submitted along with the request for change of scribe. It would be helpful if the said requirement is clearly spelt out, to avoid needless back and forth. E.g. any evidence of the scribe's medical unfitness, when that is the ground on which change is being sought, could be asked for along with a detailing documents required for the induction of the new scribe."

9. In response, Shri Baruah, learned counsel appearing for the Commission submitted that the date, i.e., 18th May, 2025 as provided in the press note is the last date for submission of the

applications for request of change of own scribe. He assured that such requests, if received within the stipulated time, would be disposed of within a period of three working days.

10. Regarding the issue of screen readers, Shri Baruah submitted that the portrayal made by the writ petitioners that only two candidates in the blind/low vision category are aspiring to give the examination by screen reader, is not acceptable to the Commission because in case a decision is taken accepting the proposal for providing screen reader facility to PwBD/PwD candidates, such option would have to be given to all eligible candidates and for the present, the Commission does not have the necessary logistical facilities for the forthcoming preliminary examination which is scheduled for 25th May, 2025. However, he has prayed for a short opportunity to file a specific affidavit on this aspect.

11. In view of the submissions noted above, we hereby provide that all the requests for change of scribe submitted by the concerned candidates who are entitled for a scribe in terms of the CSE Rules, 2025 shall be entertained till 18th May, 2025. The Commission shall immediately, upon receipt of such application, consider the same objectively and communicate the decision thereof by a reasoned order to the candidate/s concerned within a period of three working days from the date of receipt of the application/s.

12. The learned counsel for the Commission shall file a specific affidavit addressing the issue of the use of computers with screen readers by PwBD/PwD candidates in the forthcoming preliminary examination.

13. List the matter on 16th May, 2025."

[Emphasis supplied]

6. During the course of hearing on 31st October, 2025, the attention of this Court was drawn to the

additional affidavit dated 12th September, 2025 filed by respondent No. 2-UPSC. In the said affidavit, respondent No. 2-UPSC stated that it has comprehensively reviewed the entire issue and has, in-principle, resolved to introduce the facility of Screen Reader Software for visually impaired candidates appearing in various examinations conducted under its aegis. The affidavit further recites that while the decision marks a significant policy advancement towards ensuring accessibility and inclusion, the necessary infrastructure for its effective implementation is presently not in place. It has been averred that respondent No. 2-UPSC does not maintain its own examination infrastructure, and is entirely dependent upon the infrastructure, logistical support, and manpower of the State Governments, District Authorities, Schools, and Colleges which are entrusted with the conduct of its

examinations. Respondent No. 2-UPSC has, however, assured this Court that upon ensuring the feasibility, readiness, and adequacy of the requisite infrastructure and software, and after conducting comprehensive testing to ensure the integrity and security of the examination process, it shall extend the facility of Screen Reader Software to visually impaired candidates in its examinations at the earliest possible juncture.

7. The learned counsel appearing for the petitioner submitted that the petitioner is satisfied with the in-principle decision taken by respondent No. 2-UPSC to introduce Screen Reader Software for the benefit of candidates belonging to the Persons with Benchmark Disabilities/Persons with Disabilities (PwBD/PwD) category. However, it was contended that the said decision, though commendable in intent, lacks a concrete plan of implementation. Respondent No. 2-

UPSC has not yet indicated any definitive roadmap, operational framework, or timeline for equipping the examination centres with the necessary technological and infrastructural facilities required for full implementation of its intent, thereby leaving the matter in a state of uncertainty as regards its execution.

8. In response, the learned counsel appearing for respondent No. 2-UPSC submitted that the Commission is presently in active consultation and coordination with the State Authorities, the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD), and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, with a view to finalising the technical standards, operational modalities, and procedural safeguards necessary for the introduction of Screen Reader Software and for ensuring that question papers are made available in

accessible digital formats for eligible candidates. It was further submitted that respondent No. 2-UPSC is fully conscious of the imperative to maintain the sanctity, confidentiality, and security of the examination process, and that all necessary precautions are being taken to ensure that the introduction of such assistive technology does not in any manner compromise the integrity of the examination system. The learned counsel concluded by submitting that the facility of Screen Reader Software shall be made operational and available to eligible candidates from the next examination cycle, after due testing and standardisation of the required infrastructure.

9. Having heard the learned counsel for the parties and upon perusal of the additional affidavit dated 12th September, 2025 as well as the other materials placed on record by respondent No. 2-UPSC, this

Court is of the considered view that a substantial part of the grievances raised in the present writ petition stand duly alleviated. Respondent No. 2-UPSC has now taken a conscious progressive decision to extend the facility of Screen Reader Software to visually impaired candidates in various examinations to be conducted by it, thereby recognising and advancing the rights of candidates with disabilities to equal opportunity and accessibility in public examinations.

10. However, it is equally evident that while the policy decision has been taken, the mechanism and modalities for its effective implementation remain to be streamlined and operationalised. Respondent No. 2-UPSC's dependence upon external infrastructure and manpower, coupled with the absence of a clearly delineated roadmap or timeline for establishing the requisite technological framework across examination centres, underscores the need for

institutional coordination and phased execution. This Court, therefore, finds it imperative that the creases in the process for implementation be duly ironed out through concrete planning, inter-agency collaboration, and the establishment of uniform standards, so as to ensure that the laudable objective of accessibility does not remain confined to paper but is translated into practical reality in forthcoming examination cycles.

11. In view of the foregoing discussion and in order to ensure that the decision taken by respondent No. 2-UPSC is effectively translated into action and the rights of candidates belonging to the PwBD/PwD category are fully safeguarded, the following directions are issued to take the matter to its logical conclusion: -

A. Respondent No. 2-UPSC shall ensure that in every notification for the examinations

conducted by it, a clear provision is incorporated permitting candidates eligible for a scribe to request a change of scribe up to at least seven days prior to the date of the examination, and such requests shall be objectively considered and disposed of by a reasoned order within three working days of receipt of the application.

B. Respondent No. 2-UPSC shall file a comprehensive compliance affidavit within a period of two months from the date of this order, clearly delineating the proposed plan of action, timeline, and modalities for the deployment and use of Screen Reader Software for visually impaired candidates in the examinations to be conducted by it. The affidavit shall also specify the steps proposed for testing, standardisation, and validation of

the software and related infrastructure across all or designated examination centres, and shall further indicate the feasibility of ensuring that the said facility is made operational and available to all eligible candidates from the next cycle of examinations.

C. Respondent No. 2-UPSC shall, in coordination with the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) and the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD), formulate uniform guidelines and protocols for the use of Screen Reader Software and other assistive technologies to ensure standardisation, accessibility, and security of the examination

process across all or identified examination centres, as deemed fit by it.

D. Respondent No. 1-Union of India, through the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, shall extend all necessary administrative and technical support to respondent No. 2-UPSC for the expeditious implementation of the above measures and shall facilitate coordination with State Governments and examination authorities wherever required.

E. It is further directed that the implementation of these measures shall be undertaken in a manner that ensures full accessibility to eligible candidates while maintaining the sanctity, confidentiality, and fairness of the examination process.

12. The aforesaid directions are being issued to ensure that the constitutional mandate of equality, non-discrimination, and the right to live with dignity enshrined under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India, read with the provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, is meaningfully implemented, and that the facilitative measures envisaged by respondent No. 2-UPSC are operationalised in both letter and spirit within the stipulated timeframe.

13. Before parting, this Court deems it appropriate to observe that the true measure of inclusivity in governance lies not merely in the formulation of progressive policies but in their faithful and effective implementation. The rights guaranteed to persons with disabilities are not acts of benevolence, but expressions of the constitutional promise of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination enshrined in Articles

14, 19, and 21 of the Constitution of India. The Union Public Service Commission, being the premier constitutional body entrusted with upholding the values of merit and fairness in public recruitment, must ensure that its processes are accessible, transparent, and sensitive to the needs of every segment of society. It is therefore imperative that the directions issued herein are carried out with utmost earnestness, sensitivity, and expedition, so that the constitutional vision of equal opportunity and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities is not reduced to a distant aspiration, but is realised as a living, enforceable, and enduring reality in the conduct of all public examinations in the country.

14. Accordingly, the present writ petition stands disposed of, in terms of the observations and directions hereinabove.

15. Pending application(s), if any, shall stand disposed of.

16. List again on 16th February, 2026 for receiving the compliance affidavit of respondent No. 2-UPSC.

.....J.
(VIKRAM NATH)

.....J.
(SANDEEP MEHTA)

NEW DELHI;
DECEMBER 03, 2025.