

THE HON'BLE SRI JUSTICE P.KESHA VA RAO

WRIT PETITION NO.16828 OF 2015

ORDER:

Heard the learned counsel for the petitioner and the learned GP appearing for respondent Nos. 1 to 4.

2. The prayer sought in the Writ Petition is as under:

“....to issue a writ, order or direction more particularly one in the nature of mandamus, declaring the action of the 3rd respondent in directing opening of Rowdy Sheet (No. 9 of 2015 of Pendurthi Police Station) vide Proceedings C.No.03/CCRB/History Sheets/ACP-N/2014, dt. 31.03.2015, against the petitioner as illegal, without jurisdiction, unjustified both on facts and in law, apart from being violative of Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India and consequently set aside the same and direct the 4th respondent to close the Rowdy Sheet against the petitioner.”

3. The main grievance of the petitioner herein is that without there being any sufficient material, particularly, to define him as a habitual offender, a rowdy sheet has been opened on 31.3.2015 against him.

4. Learned counsel for the petitioner submits that the proceedings initiated against the petitioner in Cr.No.353 of 2010 have been quashed by virtue of the orders passed by this Court in CrI.P.No.3275 of 2011 dated 8.9.2011. Cr.No.20 of 2013 ended in acquittal vide C.C.No. 554 of 2015 dated 4.7.2016. The proceedings initiated in Cr.No.361 of 2014 are quashed by virtue of allowing of CrI.P.No.10677 of 2015 dated 18.11.2015 by this Court. As far as Cr.No.82 of 2015 is concerned, the complainant died. As of now, except Cr.No. 82 of 2015, no other criminal case is pending against

the petitioner. Therefore, the respondents have committed a material irregularity in opening rowdy sheet against the petitioner though the petitioner is not a habitual offender and the ingredients of opening of a rowdy sheet are not satisfied.

5. Respondent No.3 filed a counter affidavit stating that the petitioner is involved in four cases as mentioned in para-3 of the counter affidavit and in view of the past record of the petitioner, the rowdy sheet is being maintained to keep a close surveillance on him to maintain peace and tranquillity in the area.

6. Having heard both the counsel and from the perusal of the material on record, it is revealed that except one crime, no other case is pending against the petitioner. In fact, the condition precedent for opening of a rowdy sheet is that such person should have a reasonable record of committing offences and he is habitually addicted to commit crime or habituated to be an abettor of a crime. For the purpose of opening of a rowdy sheet, the police should have reasonable material before them to satisfy for opening of a rowdy sheet.

7. The above said issue has been dealt with by this Court and the Hon'ble Apex Court in catena of judgements, which are as under:

“In *DHANJI RAM SHARMA V/s. SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE, NORTH DISTRICT, DELHI POLICE*¹, a three Judge Bench of the Supreme Court held that the condition precedent for opening a history sheet is that such person should be reasonably believed to be habitually addicted to crime or to be an aider or abettor of crime. In order to justify opening of a history sheet, the Supreme Court

¹ AIR 1966 SC 1766

opined that the police officer must have a reasonable belief based on reasonable grounds.

In *VIJAY NARAIN SINGH V/s. STATE OF BIHAR*², another three Judge Bench of the Supreme Court held that the expression 'habitually' would mean 'repeatedly' or 'persistently' implying a thread of continuity, stringing together similar repetitive acts, and a single act or omission would not characterize an act as 'habitual'. The Supreme Court was of the opinion that to qualify as a 'habit',

a person must have grown accustomed to leading a life of crime, whereby it would be a force of habit, inherent or latent, in an individual with a criminal instinct, with a criminal disposition of mind, that makes him dangerous to society in general. This judgment was rendered in the context of preventive detention but the observations made therein as to the connotations and interpretation of the expression 'habitual' are of relevance.

In *MAJID BABU V/s. GOVERNMENT OF A.P.*³, a learned Judge of this Court was dealing with opening of a rowdy sheet under Standing Order 742. The learned Judge held that two instances of involvement in criminal cases would not make a person a 'habitual offender' and that at least more than two instances should be present before a person can be described as a habitual offender.

This principle was affirmed by another learned Judge of this Court in *KAMMA BAPUJI V/s. STATION HOUSE OFFICER, BRAHMA SAMUDRAM*⁴. In this case, the persons in whose name the rowdy sheets were opened were involved in two cases but they were acquitted in both. It was sought to be contended on behalf of the police authorities that the rowdy sheets were opened during the pendency of the cases and that acquittal therein would be of no consequence thereafter. The learned Judge rejected this

² AIR 1984 SC 1334

³ 1987 (2) ALT 904

⁴ 1997 (6) ALD 583

contention and held that rowdy sheets could not be opened in a casual and mechanical manner and a person could not be dubbed a 'habitual offender' merely because he was involved in two criminal cases.

A Division Bench of this Court in *PUTTAGUNTA PASI V/s. COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, VIJAYAWADA*⁵ confirmed this principle holding that a rowdy sheet could not be opened against an individual in a casual and mechanical manner and due care and caution should be taken by the police before characterizing a person as a rowdy. Referring to the earlier case law, the Division Bench expressed agreement with the view of the learned Judge in *KAMMA BAPUJI*⁴ that figuring as an accused in two crimes would not be sufficient to categorize a person as a 'habitual offender'. The same principle was reaffirmed in *SHAIK MAHBOOB V/s. THE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE*⁶, *GUDIVADA SAI BABA V/s. STATE OF A.P., HOME DEPARTMENT*⁷, *P.SATHIYYA NAIDU V/s. SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE, EAST GODAVARI DISTRICT*⁸ and *BEERJEPALLY VENKATESH BABU V/s. STATE OF A.P.*⁹

In *MOHAMMED QUADEER V/s. COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, HYD.*¹⁰, the same learned Judge who decided *KAMMA BAPUJI*⁴ opined that the A.P. Police Standing Orders were not statutory in nature and were only a compilation of government orders issued from time to time and they therefore did not invest the police officers with any powers of arrest, detention, investigation of crimes etc., not specifically conferred under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, or other enactments. As regards retention of a rowdy sheet, the learned Judge held that opening of a rowdy sheet against a citizen was undoubtedly fraught with serious consequences and the

⁵ 1998 (3) ALT 55 (D.B.)

⁶ 1990 (1) APLJ 363

⁷ 2002 (3) ALT 391

⁸ 2011 (2) ALT 61

⁹ 2014 (3) ALT 264

¹⁰ 1999 (3) ALD 60

right to reputation under Article 21 of the Constitution could not be deprived except in accordance with the procedure established by law. The learned Judge therefore observed that the law which authorizes the police to open rowdy sheets and exercise surveillance would have to be very strictly construed.

In *PULLA BHASKAR V/s. SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE, WARANGAL*¹¹, another learned Judge of this Court held that once there is a long interval between involvement in different criminal cases, such a person could not be termed a 'habitual offender' within the meaning of Standing Order 742.

In *SUNKARA SATYANARAYANA V/s. STATE OF ANDHRA PRADESH*¹², a learned Judge of this Court was concerned with the maintenance of history sheets/rowdy sheets for considerably long periods of time and held that the same would not only violate the right of privacy but also other fundamental rights of such persons under Articles 14 and 19 of the Constitution. The learned Judge was of the opinion that orders for opening or retention of history sheets/rowdy sheets should be passed under administrative instructions and guidelines and if such orders are challenged, the competent authority has to place the reasons before the Court justifying the opening/retention of such history sheets/rowdy sheets. The learned Judge further opined that it would be better for the police officer concerned to record his own reasons for opening/retention of the history sheets/rowdy sheets.

In *B. SATYANARAYANA REDDY V/s. STATE OF ANDHRA PRADESH*¹³, a Division Bench of this Court held that the expressions 'habitually commit', 'attempt to commit' and 'abet the commission' of offences indicate the requirement that at least two or more cases have been registered against the person concerned to characterize

¹¹ 1999 (5) ALD 155

¹² 2000 (1) ALD (CrL.) 117 (AP)

¹³ 2004 (1) ALD (CrL.) 387 (AP)

him as a person who habitually commits, attempts to or abets the commission of offences. The Division Bench held that involvement of a person in a solitary case would not be enough to classify such person as 'habitually' committing offences. The Division Bench therefore held that the solitary instance in which the appellant therein was alleged to be involved in could not constitute the basis to classify him as a rowdy."

8. In the light of the above stated settled proposition of law, it is clear that the opening of a rowdy sheet in the name of the petitioner on the basis of pendency of a solitary criminal case is not sufficient to term him as habitual offender under Clause-A of Order 601 of the Police Control Order. It is an admitted fact that out of four criminal proceedings initiated against the petitioner, two proceedings have been quashed and one case ended in acquittal. Only one case is pending against the petitioner, in which, the complainant died. In spite of the same, the respondents appear to have continued the rowdy sheet in his name.

9. In the above circumstances, this Court holds that opening of rowdy sheet in the name of the petitioner and continuance of the same thereafter, is in violation of the life and liberty as guaranteed to the petitioner under the provisions of the Constitution of India as well as contrary to the law laid down by this Court and the Hon'ble Apex Court, as stated supra.

10. Therefore, the Writ Petition is, accordingly, allowed. Consequently, the rowdy sheet opened in the name of the petitioner is hereby quashed.

Pending miscellaneous petitions, if any, shall stand closed. No order as to costs.

P. KESHAVA RAO, J

Date: 29.11.2018
KPM

