



BEFORE THE MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT

Reserved on : 22.11.2019

Pronounced on : 27.11.2019

CORAM

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE G.K.ILANTHIRAIYAN

CRL.O.P (MD) No.8330 of 2018

and

Crl.M.P.(MD) No.3736 of 2018

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1.Dhanasekaran
2.Lakshmanasamy

... Petitioners

Vs

1.The Sub Inspector of Police,
Thermal Nagar Police Station,
Thoothukudi.
Crime No.29 of 2017

2.Jeihar Jonymaju

... Respondents

PRAYER: Criminal Original Petition filed under Section 482 of Cr.P.C, praying to call for the records relating to the impugned FIR in crime No.29 of 2017 on the file of the 1st respondent and quash the same.

For Petitioners : Mr.B.Vijay Karthikeyan
For Respondent : Mr.K.Suyambulinga Bharathi, for R1
Mr.Niranjan S.Kumar for R2

O R D E R

This petition has been filed to quash the FIR registered in crime No.29 of 2017 on the file of the 1st respondent for the offence under Sections 294(b), 323, 356, 357 and 34 I.P.C.

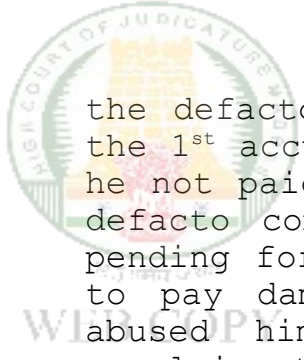
2.The learned counsel appearing for the petitioner submitted that the petitioners are arraigned as A1 and A2. On the complaint lodged by the 2nd respondent, the 1st respondent registered the case alleging that the 1st accused issued summons to one Manikandan for conducting enquiry, in respect of forging certain signatures and filed Bill of Entry in the name of Customs Broker M/s.Tryway International, Tuticorin for import of plastic articles from China. The said Manikandan appeared for enquiry on 28.04.2016 with the Check List copy with the 2nd respondent. The petitioners conducted enquiry with the said manikandan, who orally admitted that he obtained signature of Baskar Devadoss, license Holder of M/s.Tryway International in the declaration form for service centre for filling Bill of Entry with EDI service centre with the help of the 2nd respondent. The said Manikandan himself signed in the Check List copy filed for assessment and examination purpose as if signed by Baskar Devadoss himself. The 2nd respondent also orally informed that the said Bill of Entry was filed by his friend. Both of them appeared before the petitioners on 29.04.2016 for enquiry. During

the said process, the action will be taken against M/s.Tryway International and also in the above act of signing the declaration form for filing Bill of Entry. Suddenly, the 2nd respondent became emotional and started using abusive and filthy language against the petitioners and sustained injuries. Immediately, the 1st petitioner lodged complaint with the 1st respondent and a case has been registered in crime No.78 of 2016. In order to take personal revenge against the petitioners, who are being the Customs Special Intelligence Officials, the 2nd respondent lodged false complaint with the allegation that they demanded money from the defacto complainant and also abused him with filthy language and attacked him.

3.The learned counsel further submitted that the petitioners being the Customs Officers have protection under Section 155 of the Customs Act, 1962. Therefore, the 1st respondent ought not to have registered the case as against the petitioners without any prior notice, when they intended to be done in good faith that too when they are discharging their official duty. He further submitted that the 1st respondent did not follow the procedure contemplated under Section 197 Cr.P.C. Without even getting any sanction, the 1st respondent directly registered the case and as such, the entire FIR is vitiated and it is liable to be quashed. In support of his contention, he relied upon the following decisions:

- (i)1996 (82) E.L.T.433(S.C.) - Costao Fernandes Vs. State at the Instance of D.S.P., CBI, Bombay**
- (ii)2016 (338) E.L.T. 255 (Cal.) - Ashok Kumar Singh V. State of West Bengal**
- (iii)2016 (335) E.L.T. 399 (P&H) - Sunil Kumar V. Central Bureau of Investigation**
- (iv)Order of the High Court of Calcutta dated 03.09.2009 - Shri Nitai Chandra Das & Ors. Vs. The State of West Bengal & Anr.**

4.Per contra, the learned counsel appearing for the 2nd respondent submitted that the 2nd respondent is working as a Customs Clerk Agent in M/s.Tryway International, Tuticorin. His nature of employment is that for his employer, he has to appear before the Customs Office to clear the export and import goods with the relevant documents and after obtaining permission clearing of the said goods, the imported or exported goods would be taken out. While being so, he was engaged to clear the goods on behalf of the AFI Trading Company, in which, the defacto complainant was permitted to submit all the documents before the Customs Office and submitted documents on 22.04.2016. Thereafter, he was asked to come to office on 25.04.2016 and thereafter, on 26.04.2016. The Officers made thorough examination on the imported goods. Again he was called to office on 29.04.2016. When he went the customs office and enquired about the customs import bill with the 1st accused, for which, A1 demanded Rs.1 lakh as bribe to clear the imported goods. However,



the defacto complainant refused to pay the said amount, for which, the 1st accused threatened him with dire consequences saying that if he not paid the amount, the goods will not be cleared. Though the defacto complainant requested to release the goods, since it was pending for the past 10 days and if the goods not released, he has to pay damage fees and rent for the container, immediately, A1 abused him with filthy language and thereafter, the defacto complainant expressed among with other accused that he would inform the same to the vigilance, for which, immediately, A1 and A2 attacked the defacto complainant with their legs that too with shoes. Further, they also scolded the defacto complainant with his caste name and abused him. Immediately, he lodged the complaint before the Inspector of Police, Thermal Nagar Police Station. But, since they refused to receive the complaint, he lodged a complaint before the Muthiahpuram Police Station, where, they also did not take any action, the defacto complainant approached the learned Judicial Magistrate No.2, Tuticorin and filed a private complaint in Cr.M.P.No.4976 of 2017 and on the direction of the Court, the present FIR has been registered as against the petitioners.

5.He further submitted that there are specific averments and allegations to attract the offences as against the petitioners and as such, it cannot be quashed at the threshold and the investigating machinery has to step in to investigate, grab and unearth the crime in accordance with the procedures prescribed in the Code and hence, he prayed for the dismissal of this petition.

6.The learned Government Advocate (criminal side) submitted that on the direction issued by the learned Judicial Magistrate No.2, Tuticorin under Section 156 Cr.P.C., the 1st respondent registered the case in crime No.29 of 2017 for the offences under Sections 294(b), 323, 356, 357 and 34 I.P.C. The petitioners are arraigned as A1 and A2 and there are specific averments as against the petitioners to attract the offences.

7.He further submitted that the protection under Section 155 of Customs Act would not helpful to the petitioners, since, they committed very serious offences and in the customs office, they attacked the defacto complainant and also abused him with filthy language using his caste name. The petitioners also lodged complaint as against the defacto complainant and the same has also been registered in crime No.78 of 2016 for the offences under Sections 294(b), 323, 353 and 506(i) I.P.C. as against the second respondent. Therefore, both the crimes have to be investigated in depth by following the procedures contemplated under 588-A of Police Standing Orders.

8.Heard the learned counsel appearing for the petitioner, the learned counsel appearing for the 2nd respondent and the learned Government Advocate (criminal side) appearing for the 1st respondent.



9.The petitioners are arraigned as A1 and A2 on the complaint lodged by the 2nd respondent before the learned Judicial Magistrate No.2, Tuticorin, who referred the complaint in Cr.M.P.No.4976 of 2017 under Section 156(3) Cr.P.C. to the 1st respondent for investigation. On receipt of the same, the 1st respondent registered the FIR in crime No.29 of 20176 for the offences under Sections 294 (b), 323, 356, 357 and 34 I.P.C.

10.The brief facts of the case, according to the petitioners that the 2nd respondent/defacto complainant was working under M/s.Tryway International, Tuticorin. The 1st petitioner/A1 issued summon to the 2nd respondent and to one B.Manikandan for enquiry to be conducted on 28.04.2016. The 2nd respondent being the H-card holder attended the enquiry. The preliminary oral enquiry was conducted with the said B.Manikandan, who orally admitted that he obtained signature of one Baskar Devadoss, license holder of M/s.Tryway International in the declaration form for service centre for Bill of Entry with EDI service centre with the help of the 2nd respondent herein. But, the said B.Manikandan himself signed in the Check List copy of Bill filed for assessment and examination purpose as if signed by the said Baskar Devadoss. In this regard, the 2nd respondent and the said B.Manikandan again appeared on 29.04.2016 for further enquiry. While being so, the 2nd respondent became emotional and started using abusive and filthy language against the petitioners and also assaulted the 1st petitioner herein, who sustained injuries and admitted in the hospital. Immediately, he lodged the complaint with the 1st respondent and the same was registered in crime No.78 of 2016 as against the 2nd respondent. Whereas, it is the case of the 2nd respondent that he went to the office of the petitioners to clear the goods imported by their customer for clearance. On 28.04.2016, the petitioners' Inspectors examined all the imported goods and agreed to clear the goods. In this regard, again, the 2nd respondent was called upon to come on 29.04.2016 and accordingly, he went to the office, where, the 1st accused demanded a sum of Rs.1 lakh for clearing the assignments. When the 2nd respondent refused to give the amount, A1 scolded him with filthy language and also abused him with the help of A2 and both the petitioners after closing the door attacked him and hence, he sustained injuries.

11.On seeing both the versions, this Court is of the view that no offence is made out under the Customs Act. Both were attacked with each other and as such, on the complaint lodged by the 1st petitioner, already the 1st respondent registered the case as against the 2nd respondent and on the complaint lodged by the 2nd respondent before the respondent police, since there was no action, he moved the learned Judicial Magistrate No.2, Tuticorin by way of private complaint and on the direction of the learned Judicial Magistrate, the 1st respondent registered the present case as against the petitioners. In these circumstances, when the petitioners being the Superintendent and Inspector of Customs, whether they are



protected under Section 155 of the Customs Act, 1962 or not?

12. In this regard, the learned counsel appearing for the petitioner relied upon the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India reported in **1996 (82) E.L.T.433(S.C.) - Costao Fernandes Vs. State at the Instance of D.S.P., CBI, Bombay**, wherein, it has been held as follows:

"10. Faced with the position that the wound were not self inflicted and the killing could have been, indeed was, in self-defence, the submission is that the protection of Section 155, nonetheless, is not available because killing of a smuggler is not a part of the official duty, which alone is protected by this section. It is laboured hard to impress that the official duty, in the present case, was confined to stop the movement of the vehicle and no further. After the vehicle was got stopped, the submission, that the act in performance of official duty was over and the appellant could not have scuffled with the deceased leading to the latter's death. We cannot agree inasmuch as on 16th itself it was stated at the spot by some watchers to the police officer who came there that the appellant was "trying to grab the ignition key" of the vehicle which was being driven by the deceased. This shows that the appellant was trying to prevent the mobility of the vehicle. If while engaged in such an act, the appellant was assaulted, and 22 times at that, with an instrument like knife causing bruises, abrasions, incised wounds on various parts of body like cheek, chest, back, shoulder, arm, leg and thigh, he could not have allowed himself to be killed, but had to defend himself by retaliation. The killing was thus not divorced from the performance of the duty enjoined by Section 106 of the Act."

13. In the above case, when the official of the customs was on his duty, a smuggler was going on with his car and when he stopped the vehicle, there was a scuffle between the accused and the official and the accused met with an accident and died and in the said occurrence, the official was also sustained injuries and as such, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India held that since the act of the official was committed while he was discharging his official duty, he was protected under Section 155 of the Customs Act.

14. The High Court of Calcutta in the case reported in **2016 (338) E.L.T. 255 (Cal.) - Ashok Kumar Singh V. State of West Bengal**, it has been held as follows:

"14. The petitioner as an Examining Officer of the Customs is committed to perform duty in order to assist the



principal accused Pramod Kumar Kishorepuria in his attempt to export goods improperly from India. The provision of Section 155(2) of the Customs Act, 1962 which is in pari materia with the provision of Section 40(2) of the Central Excise Act, 1955 lays down that an officer of the Government cannot be prosecuted after expiry of three months from the date of accrual of cause of action and without giving previous notice in writing of one month for anything purporting to be done in pursuance of the said Act. The word "Act" as defined in the General Clauses Act, 1897 shall include even illegal omissions. Accordingly, the words "anything purporting to be done in pursuance of this Act" in Section 155(2) of the Customs Act, 1962 will extend to illegal omissions and infractions of the requirement of the said Act. The action or omission on the part of the present petitioner as Examining Officer of the Customs for assisting the principal accused Pramod Kumar Kishorepuria for which penalty was imposed on him and paid by him under Section 114 of the Customs Act, 1962 will come within the ambit of "anything purporting to be done in pursuance of this Act" appearing in Section 155(2) of the Customs Act, 1962. As a result, the criminal prosecution against the present petitioner will be barred after expiry of three months from the date of accrual of cause of action and without giving notice in writing of one month as laid down in Section 155(2) of the Customs Act, 1962. The present criminal proceeding initiated against the petitioner after about 14 months from the date of accrual of cause of action is, thus, barred under Section 155(2) of the Customs Act, 1962. Since the criminal proceeding against the petitioner is barred by limitation, the continuation of the said criminal proceeding against the petitioner will be an abuse of the process of the Court. So, I invoke my power under Section 482 of the Code of Criminal Procedure for quashing the said criminal proceeding against the petitioner."

15. In the above case, the provision of Section 155(2) of the Customs Act, which is in pari materia with the provision of Section 40(2) of the Central Excise Act, 1955 lays down that an officer of the Government cannot be prosecuted after expiry of three months from the date of accrual of cause of action and without giving previous notice in writing of one month for anything purporting to be done in pursuance of the said Act and as such, on the ground of limitation, the proceedings was declared as barred by limitation.

16. In the case reported in **2016 (335) E.L.T. 399 (P&H) - Sunil Kumar V. Central Bureau of Investigation**, the High Court of Punjab and Haryana at Chandigarh held as follows:'

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7. In the case of **Shri Nitai Chandra Das & Ors. Vs. The State of Bengal & Anr** dated **03.09.2009**, the Calcutta High Court has said as follows:

"In the instant case from annexure-P/8 annexed to the application filed by the petitioners it appears that the sanctioning authority declined to accord sanction for prosecution of the present petitioners. The ground to decline sanction was that the petitioners are entitled to get protection under Section 155 of the Customs Act, 1962. From annexure P/8 it further appears that the sanctioning authority applied his kind to the facts of the case and refused to accord sanction. The question of necessity of sanction depends upon the facts and circumstance of each case. There must be a reasonable connection between the alleged acts and



discharge of official duties. In the instant case the sanctioning authority, the Commissioner of Customs (preventive) West Bengal declined to accord sanction and opined that the petitioners are the customs officers and they are entitled to get protection under Section 155 of the Customs Act.

The protective umbrella provided to a public servant under Section 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure does not intend to every act or omission done by the public servant in service but restricts its scope of operation to only those acts or omission which are done by a public servant in discharge of his official duty. A public servant cannot be prosecuted without sanction if the public servant is alleged to have committed an offence during discharge of his official duty.

From the materials placed on record it appears that the acts of the petitioner/accused persons were alleged to have been committed in discharge of their official duties which they were required to do as per the order issued by Customs Authority to find out fake Indian currency Notes. Mandate engrafted in sub Section (I) of Section 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure debarring a court from taking cognizance of an offence except with a previous sanction is a prohibition imposed by the statute from taking cognizance. In the present case at hand the Authority refused to grant sanction for prosecution after considering the entire facts and circumstances of the case and relevant provision of law. In the present case the offence alleged to have been committed by the public servants in discharge of their official duties and sanction to prosecute has been declined by the Appropriate Authority.

All the above judgments are misconceived on facts of law and they are not consonance to the resolution or to the interpretation as given by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

18. In this regard, it is relevant to rely upon the judgment of this Court dated **30.01.2018** in the case of **Thirumurthy Vs. Inspector of Police**, wherein, this Court has held as follows:

"Section 155 of the Customs Act reads as under:

(1) No suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding shall lie against the Central Government or any officer of the Government or a local authority for anything which is done, or intended to be done in good faith, in pursuance of this Act or the rules or regulations. (2)

No proceeding other than a suit shall be commenced

<https://hcservices.ecourts.gov.in/hcservices/> the Central Government or any officer of the



Government or a local authority for anything purporting to be done in pursuance of this Act without giving the Central Government or such officer a month's previous notice in writing of the intended proceeding and of the cause thereof, or after the expiration of three months from the accrual of such cause.

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16. In Para 11 in Sunil Kumar and Ors vs Central Bureau of Investigation judgements relied by the learned counsel for the petitioner, it is observed that,

11. The section consists of two sub-sections. The first sub-section speaks of bar of suits against the Central Government or against any officer of the Government in respect of any order passed in good faith or any act in good faith done or ordered to be done under the Act. The second sub-section speaks of limitation of suits, prosecution or other legal proceeding for anything done or ordered to be done under the Act after the expiration of six months from the accrual of the cause of action or from the date of the act or order complained. The two subsections operate in different fields. The first sub-section contemplates bar of suits against the Central Government or against the officers by protecting them in respect of orders passed in good faith or acts done in good faith. It is manifest that the second subsection does not have any words of restriction or limitation of class of persons unlike sub-section (1). Sub-section (2) does not have any words of qualification as to persons. Therefore, subsection (2) is applicable to any individual or person.

17. If one accept the fallacious interpretation given in this judgment and venture to bisect sub-sections (1) and (2) of Section 155 of the Customs Act and read sub-section (2) disjointly and independent of subsection (1) without its aid, then on the expiry of three months from the date of cause of action, it will be providing immunity from all proceedings except civil proceedings to a person who purport to act under the Customs Act. This interpretation is per se ignorable since it will have over riding effect on all other acts such as Indian Penal Code, All special Acts with penal consequences and Chapter XXXVI (Limitation of taking cognizance of certain offences) of Code of Criminal



Procedure. Also, If this interpretation is accepted, then offenders will enjoy larger protection than the limited and restricted immunity provided to constitutional authorities such as President and governors under Article 361 of the Indian Constitution.

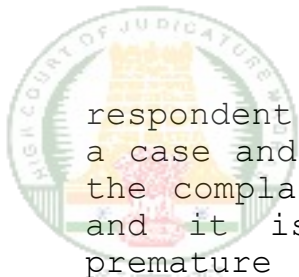
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18. Therefore, sub-sections(1) and (2) of section 155 has to be read conjointly and not disjointly. "Good faith" and "anything done pursuance of this Act" (to be read as customs Act) which are twin pre-conditions mentioned in sub-section (1) to be satisfied primarily. For those who satisfy the said twin conditions, proceedings shall be initiated after expiry of one month notice and within 3 months from the date of cause of action as per sub-section (2) of Section 155 of the Act. If the pre-conditions mentioned in sub-section (1) is not attracted, the compliance of mandate mentioned in sub-section (2) does not arise.

19. The judgement of the Supreme Court in Raju's case cited supra and relied by the Calcutta High Court and Punjab and Haryana High court which in turn relied by the learned counsel for the petitioner is factually different from the case in hand. Raju's case arise out of private complaint under the Central Excise and Salt Act. When section 40 of the Central Excise and Salt Act was put to test in connection with prosecution for violation of rules 9,53,64,67,68,70,71,66 and 226 and punishable under section 9 (3) of Central Excise and Salt Act, and section 420 r/w 511 and section 109 IPC in a private complaint other than by police report, the Apex Court held that, Section 40 of the Central Excise and Salt Act is applicable. "

19.Perusal of the said judgments along with the present case, the present case on hand is arising out of the offence under Indian Penal Code and also arising out of completely different set of facts. IN view of the above judgments of this Court, the cases referred by the learned counsel appearing for the petitioners are not helpful to the case on hand. Therefore, the petitioners are not entitled for the benefits contemplated under Section 155(2) of the Customs Act, since no proceedings appearing in sub section 2 of Section 155 of the Customs Act do not include criminal prosecution as for the protection pertaining to prosecution, there is specific provision under Sub Section 1 of Section 155 of the Customs Act.

20.Insofar as the another ground raised by the petitioner that the 1st respondent proceeded with the investigation without getting sanction under Section 197 Cr.P.C. Now, the case is at the stage of investigation is under progress. Admittedly, the 1st



respondent did not complete the investigation and in fact, there is a case and case in counter in another FIR in crime No.78 of 2016 on the complaint given by the 1st petitioner against the 2nd respondent and it is also pending for investigation. Therefore, it is premature to avail the benefit under Section 197 Cr.P.C. Pending investigation, it is upto the 1st respondent to accord sanction to prosecute the petitioners.

21.It is also relevant to rely upon the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India passed in **Crl.A.No.255 of 2019** dated **12.02.2019 - Sau. Kamal Shivaji Pokarnekhar vs. the State of Maharashtra & ors.**, as follows:-

"4. The only point that arises for our consideration in this case is whether the High Court was right in setting aside the order by which process was issued. It is settled law that the Magistrate, at the stage of taking cognizance and summoning, is required to apply his judicial mind only with a view to taking cognizance of the offence, or in other words, to find out whether a prima facie case has been made out for summoning the accused persons. The learned Magistrate is not required to evaluate the merits of the material or evidence in support of the complaint, because the Magistrate must not undertake the exercise to find out whether the materials would lead to a conviction or not.

5. Quashing the criminal proceedings is called for only in a case where the complaint does not disclose any offence, or is frivolous, vexatious, or oppressive. If the allegations set out in the complaint do not constitute the offence of which cognizance has been taken by the Magistrate, it is open to the High Court to quash the same. It is not necessary that a meticulous analysis of the case should be done before the Trial to find out whether the case would end in conviction or acquittal. If it appears on a reading of the complaint and consideration of the allegations therein, in the light of the statement made on oath that the ingredients of the offence are disclosed, there would be no justification for the High Court to interfere.

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8.....



9. Having heard the learned Senior Counsel and examined the material on record, we are of the considered view that the High Court ought not to have set aside the order passed by the Trial Court issuing summons to the Respondents. A perusal of the complaint discloses that prima facie, offences that are alleged against the Respondents. The correctness or otherwise of the said allegations has to be decided only in the Trial. At the initial stage of issuance of process it is not open to the Courts to stifle the proceedings by entering into the merits of the contentions made on behalf of the accused. Criminal complaints cannot be quashed only on the ground that the allegations made therein appear to be of a civil nature. If the ingredients of the offence alleged against the accused are prima facie made out in the complaint, the criminal proceeding shall not be interdicted."

22.It is seen from the First Information Report that there are specific allegation as against the petitioners, which has to be investigated. Further the FIR is not an encyclopedia and it need not contain all facts and it cannot be quashed in the threshold. This Court finds that the FIR discloses prima facie commission of cognizable offence and as such this Court cannot interfere with the investigation. The investigating machinery has to step in to investigate, grab and unearth the crime in accordance with the procedures prescribed in the Code.

23.In view of the above, this Court is not inclined to quash the FIR. Accordingly, this criminal original petition is dismissed. Consequently, connected miscellaneous petition is also dismissed. However, the first respondent is directed to follow the procedures contemplated under Order 588-A of the Police Standing Orders and complete the investigation in both the crime numbers viz., 78 of 2016 and 29 of 2017 and complete the investigation and file a final report within a period of eight weeks from the date of receipt of copy of this order, before the jurisdictional Magistrate.

Sd/-

Assistant Registrar (CS-III)

// True Copy //

Sub Assistant Registrar(CS)



Arul

To

1.The Sub Inspector of Police,
Thermal Nagar Police Station,
Thoothukudi.

2.The Additional Public Prosecutor,
Madurai Bench of Madras High Court,
Madurai.

+1 CC to M/s.B. VIJAY KARTHIKEYAN, Advocate (SR-101846[F] dated
27/11/2019)

+1 CC to M/s.NIRAJAN.S.KUMAR, Advocate (SR-102190[F] dated
28/11/2019)

Order made in
CRL.O.P (MD) No.8330 of 2018
27.11.2019

SMA/11/12/19/13P/5C