



BEFORE THE MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT

DATED: 17.09.2020

CORAM

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE G.R. SWAMINATHAN

W.P. (MD) No.11980 of 2020

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Shanthakumari

... Petitioner

Vs.

1.The District Revenue Officer,
Kanyakumari District,
At Nagercoil.

2.The Taluk Supply Officer,
Civil Supply Department,
Vilavancode Taluk,
Kanyakumari District.

... Respondents

Prayer: Writ petition is filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, to issue a Writ of Mandamus, directing the respondents to release the vehicle, namely, Maxx Pickup bearing Reg.No.TN-75-P-2783.

For Petitioner	:	Mr.A.Balakrishnan
For Respondents	:	Mr.M.Rajarajan
		Additional Government Pleader

ORDER

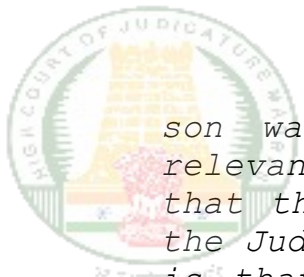
Heard the learned counsel on either side. By consent of both parties, this writ petition is taken up for final disposal at the admission stage itself.

2.The petition mentioned vehicle was seized for having violated the provisions of the Essential Commodities Act. The learned Additional Government Pleader states that confiscation order under Section 14 of the Tamil Nadu Prohibition Act has not been initiated. Without prejudice to the confiscation proceedings, I am of the view that the vehicle can be directed to be returned to the petitioner herein.

3.In similar circumstances, this Court vide order dated 09.07.2020 in W.P.(MD)No.2679 of 2020 (Sathiah v. The State of Tamil Nadu and Others) has passed the following order:-

"Heard the learned counsel on either side.

2. The petition mentioned vehicle belongs to the petitioner herein. It appears that the said vehicle was involved in Crime No.231 of 2019, registered on the file of the third respondent under Tamil Nadu Prohibition Act, 1937. The petitioner's son Karthick was arrested and he was found in possession of 384 Brandy Bottles. The petitioner's



son was said to have driven the said vehicle at the relevant point of time. The grievance of the petitioner is that the vehicle in question has not been produced before the Judicial Magistrate till date. His further apprehension is that even without complying the necessary procedures, the second respondent is likely to auction the vehicle, which necessitated the petitioner to file the present Writ Petition.

3. The learned counsel for the petitioner placed reliance on the order dated 06.06.2019 made in CrI.O.P.No.11945 of 2019, wherein the learned judge has observed as follows:-

11.The provisions of Section 49A of the Tamil Nadu Forest Act does not in any way take away the jurisdiction of the Magistrate Court to exercise its power under Section 451 or 457 of Cr.P.C. The confiscation of a vehicle involved in the commission of an offence under the Tamil Nadu Forest Act is not only punitive in nature but also a deterrent. When a vehicle is involved in the commission of offence under the Tamil Nadu Forest Act and there are prima facie materials to show that the owner of the vehicle did not have any knowledge or connivance in the commission of the offence, he can always file an application for return of vehicle under Section 451 or 457 of Cr.P.C. But, however the Court while exercising its powers will have to do it with care and caution and should provide an opportunity to the Public Prosecutor and also must keep in mind the spirit behind Section 49A of the Tamil Nadu Forest Act, 1882 and its benevolent object.

12.Even though, the Judgment cited by the learned counsel for the petitioner deals with the case under the Tamil Nadu Prohibition Act, the ratio in the said Judgment can be applied even in a case where confiscation proceedings have been initiated under the Tamil Nadu Forest Act.

13.In view of the above, the reason given by the Court below for returning the petition filed by the petitioner is unsustainable and the same is hereby set aside. The Court below is directed to consider the petitioner afresh by keeping in mind the judgment of the Hon'ble Division bench referred supra and after affording an opportunity to the prosecution. This exercise shall be completed by the Court below within a period of one month from the date of a receipt of



copy of this order.

4. The learned Government counsel wanted to rely upon G.O.Ms.No.39 dated 22.10.2019, Home, Prohibition and Excise (VIII) Department to sustain his contention that the second respondent can very well auction the vehicle in question. But the said Government order will come into play after the confiscation is done under Section 14 of Tamil Nadu Prohibition Act 1937. In this case, there is nothing on record to show the fulfillment of formalities set out in Section 14(4) of the Tamil Nadu Prohibition Act. Therefore, the question of auctioning the vehicle even without formal confiscation does not arise at all. Also, it does not mean that the vehicle involved in criminal case should not be produced before the Jurisdictional Court. In fact, the provisions of Criminal Procedure Code envisage that the seized vehicle should be produced before the Jurisdictional Court and the party concerned can avail the right to claim the vehicle by way of interim or final custody.

5. Therefore, I direct the respondents to produce the vehicle in question before the jurisdictional criminal Court without any further delay. Upon such production, it is open to the petitioner to apply for return under Section 451 of Cr.P.C. Of course, the authorities are at liberty to take action to confiscate the vehicle as per law.

6. In the above terms, the Writ Petition is allowed. No costs."

4. The petitioner's counsel on instructions gives an undertaking that the petitioner will not alienate the petition mentioned vehicle for any illegal activities in future. If the petition mentioned vehicle is again involved, the order now passed will be recalled and the petitioner may have to forfeit the custody.

5. Therefore, the respondents are directed to release the said vehicle subject to the following conditions:-

- a) The petitioner is directed to pay a sum of Rs.25,000/- (Rupees Twenty Five Thousand only) in favour of the Officer-in-Charge, High Court Legal Services Committee, Madurai Bench of Madras High Court, Madurai, S.B.A/c.No.496037387, IFSC : IDIB000H040, Indian Bank, High Court Branch, Madurai. It will be a non refundable payment. The Registrar (Judicial) is directed to spend the amount for appropriate welfare activities such as feeding the disadvantaged communities in Madurai District.

- b) The petitioner shall not alienate or encumber the vehicle



in question till the proceedings are completed.

- c) As and when the respondents call for the vehicle for enquiry, the petitioner has to produce the vehicle in question and he shall cooperate with the enquiry to be conducted by the respondents.

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6. Upon completion of these formalities, the respondents shall release the vehicle forthwith without any delay. If this undertaking given by the petitioner is breached, the petitioner will not be entitled to interim release of the vehicle in future. I make it clear that I have only ordered interim custody to be given to the petitioner. It will have no bearing on the confiscation proceedings that is still pending. The Writ Petition is allowed accordingly. There shall be no order as to costs.

Sd/-

Assistant Registrar

// True Copy //

/ /2020

Sub Assistant Registrar(CS)

sjj

Note In view of the present lock down owing to COVID-19 pandemic, a web copy of the order may be utilized for official purposes, but, ensuring that the copy of the order that is presented is the correct copy, shall be the responsibility of the advocate/litigant concerned.

To

1. The District Revenue Officer,
Kanniyakumari District,
At Nagercoil.

2. The Taluk Supply Officer,
Civil Supply Department,
Vilavancode Taluk, Kanniyakumari District.

Copy to : 1. The Registrar (Judicial),
Madurai Bench of Madras High Court, Madurai.

2. The Officer Incharge,
High Court Legal Services Committee,
Madurai Bench of Madras High Court, Madurai.

+1 CC to M/s.GP (SR-17469[F] dated 18/09/2020)

W.P. (MD) No.11980 of 2020
17.09.2020

SCR(CO)

AP(24/09/2020) 4P 6C

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