BEFORE THE MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT

(Criminal Jurisdiction)

Wednesday,the Twenty Seventh day of January Two Thousand and Twenty One

PRESENT

The Hon'ble Mr.Justice K.MURALI SHANKAR

CRL MP(MD) No.7709 of 2020
IN
CRL A(MD) No.381 of 2020

SULAIMAN HUSSAIN
(NOW CONFINED IN CENTRAL PRISON, MADURAI)
... PETITIONER/APPELLANT/ACCUSED

Vs

THE STATE REP. BY
THE INSPECTOR OF POLICE
SPE/C.B.I./EOW,
CHENNAI. ... RESPONDENT/RESPONDENT/COMPLAINANT

Petition filed praying that in the circumstances stated therein and in the petition filed therewith the High Court may be pleased to suspend the sentence imposed in C.C.No.7/2006 passed by the Learned II Additional District Judge (C.B.I. Cases), Madurai dated 15.12.2020 and enlarge the petitioner on bail, pending disposal of the CRL A(MD) No.381 of 2020.

Prayer in CRL A(MD) NO.381/2020:
Criminal Appeal filed may be pleased to call for the records and set aside the conviction and sentence passed in C.C.No.7 of 2006 dated 15.12.2020 by the learned II Additional District Court for CBI Cases, Madurai against the appellant is concerned.

Order : This petition coming up for orders on this day, upon perusing the petition filed in support thereof and upon hearing the arguments of Mr.ARL.SUNDARESAN, Senior Counsel for Mr.G.SIVARAJA, Advocate for the petitioner and of Ms.L.VICTORIA GOWRI, Assistant Solicitor General of India for CBI Cases on behalf of the Respondent, the Court made the following order:-

Reserved on : 19.01.2021
Delivered on : 27.01.2021

The petitioner is the accused in C.C.No.7 of 2006 on the file of the learned II Additional District Court for CBI Cases, Madurai. After filing of the final report, the case was taken on file in

C.C.No.4 of 2006 as against nine accused and that since the present petitioner, who was the third accused therein, remained absconding, the case as against him was ordered to be spilt up as C.C.No.7 of 2006 and that therefore, the parent case in C.C.No.4 of 2006 was tried and disposed of on 17.03.2017.

2.The case of the prosecution is that the present petitioner and other accused entered into a criminal conspiracy and opened current accounts at State Bank of India, Pudukottai by giving false particulars, that the petitioner herein and along with four other accused had prepared the cheques purportedly issued from three branches of UCO Bank at Santa Cruz (East) Branch, Service branch and Andheri (West) Branch in Mumbai and Indian Bank Mumbai and Indian Bank, Fort Branch, Mumbai, by giving imaginary cheque numbers, that the said accused started depositing those out stations cheques with SBI, Pudukkottai to the tune of Rs.1,09,86,000/-, that the said cheques were processed and transmitted to State Bank of India, Service Branch, Madurai through courier as usual, that the said accused with the help of an employee of Professional courier, had collected all the covers sent by the Pudukkottai Branch of State Bank of India to Mumbai containing the cheques and collections schedules, and returned the same covers by placing unwanted papers after removing the cheques and the collection schedules, that the accused had destroyed the fabricated cheques and the collection schedules and prepared forged and fabricated payment advices purportedly issued by the State Bank of India, Service Branch Mumbai, that on receipt of such payment advices by the Pudukkottai Branch of SBI, amount were credited into the accounts opened by the petitioner, that subsequently, the said amounts were withdrawn by presenting 42 cheques issued by the petitioner in the impersonated names and that due to the said acts of the accused, SBI, Pudukkottai had incurred loss of Rs.1,08,07,599/- and corresponding wrongful gain to the accused.

3.The trial Court has framed the charges under Section 120(B) r/w 419, 468, 471, 420, 201 IPC and u/s 13(2) r/w 13(1) (d) of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 and u/s 419, 468, 471, 420 and 201 IPC. After conducting trial, by examining 20 witness and by exhibiting 74 documents, the learned trial Judge came to the conclusion that the petitioner was guilty of charges framed against him, convicted and sentenced to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 7 years and to pay a fine of Rs.5,00,000/- in default to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 6 months for the offence under Section 120 (B) r/w 419, 468, 471, 420, 201 IPC and u/s 13(2) r/w 13(1) (D) of Prevention of Corruption Act; to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for three years and to pay a fine of Rs. 5,00,000/- in default to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 6 months for the offence under Section 419 IPC; to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 7 years and to pay a fine of Rs.5,00,000/- in default to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for six months for the offence under Section 468 IPC; to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 7 years and to pay a fine of

Rs.5,00,000/- in default to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 6 months for the offence under Section 471 IPC; to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 7 years and to pay a fine of Rs.5,00,000/- in default to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 6 months for the offence under Section 420 IPC and to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 1 year and to pay a fine of Rs.25,000/- in default to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 3 months for the offence under Section 201 IPC. Aggrieved by the said judgment of conviction, the petitioner has come forward with the present appeal and the above application for suspension of sentence.

4.The learned trial Judge has imposed total fine of Rs.25,25,000/- , but admittedly, the same is not paid. The learned Senior Counsel would contend that the petitioner undertakes to deposit the entire fine amount, if any conditional order is passed by this Court, while granting appeal bail. But the fact remains that the petitioner has not paid any amount towards fine till now.

5.The learned Senior Counsel would contend that two of the accused were acquitted by the trial Court in the main case in C.C.No.4 of 2006 and that therefore, the conviction recorded by the trial Court under composite charge of conspiracy is unsustainable, that though the prosecution has stated that the petitioner was introduced by the 9th accused Mohan to the first accused/Bank Manager, the said accused Mohan has already been acquitted by the trial Court and therefore, there is absolutely no material available to implicate the petitioner in the said case, that the prosecution has failed to establish the connection between the petitioner and the Ayoob, who is said to have opened the current account, that the petitioner's identity was not at all established, that identification parade was not at all conducted to prove the identity of the accused, though forgery of cheques were alleged, machineries and equipments used for forging the documents were not at all recovered, that there was no corroboration for the evidence of P.W.19/approver and that the conviction recorded by the trial Court is illegal and contrary to law.

6.The respondent filed the counter statement raising serious objections and whereunder, it is alleged that the prosecution has proved its case against the petitioner, that a thin film used for preparing forged and fabricated envelope with SBI emblem was seized from the residence of A4, that the petitioner alone had opened two accounts in the name of 'Ayoob', that the witnesses P.W.6 and P.W.7 had identified the accused before the trial Court, that the petitioner, while surrendering before the Judicial Magistrate, Aruppukkottai, filed the surrender petition by signing as Hussain, that the petitioner had absconded at relevant point of time and that is why, the case was split up from the main case, that the petitioner was also continuously absent during the course of trial proceedings and that the petitioner committed the fraud in a pre-planned manner and causes wrongful loss to the Bank to the tune of more than Rs.1 Crore in the year 2002 and that therefore, the above petition is liable to be dismissed.

7.Heard the learned Senior Counsel appearing for the petitioner and the learned Assistant Solicitor General appearing for the respondent. Perused the records.

8.The only point that arises for consideration is as to whether the sentence imposed on the petitioner/accused is to be suspended and is to be granted appeal bail?

9.The learned counsel for the respondent would strongly contend that the above petition itself is not maintainable as the suspension of conviction is unknown to the cases involving corruption and relied upon the judgment of the Hon'ble Apex Court in State of Maharashtra through CBI ACB, Mumbai Vs. Balakrishnan Dattatrya Kumbhar (Crl.A.No.1648 of 2012, dated 15.10.2012:)

> “14. ..... Corruption is not only a punishable offence but also undermines human rights, indirectly violating them, and systematic corruption, is a human rights violation in itself, as it leads to systematic economic crimes. Thus, in the aforesaid backdrop, the High Court should not have passed the said order of suspension of sentence in a case involving corruption. It was certainly not the case where damage if done, could not be undone as the employee / respondent if ultimately succeeds, could claim all consequential benefits. The submission made on behalf of the respondent, that this Court should not interfere with the impugned order at such a belated stage, has no merit for the reason that this Court, vide order dated 09.07.2009 has already stayed the operation of the said impugned order.”

In the said case, the accused has approached the High Court, challenging the judgment of conviction by filing an appeal and application under Section 389(1) Cr.P.C, seeking orders for suspension of conviction and that the High Court has allowed the application and suspended the conviction itself, vide order dated 08.04.2008. When the said order of High Court was challenged before the Hon'ble Supreme Court, by observing that in the exceptional cases, conviction may be suspended along with the sentence, but such power must be exercised with great circumspection and caution, for the purpose of which, the applicant must satisfy the Court as regards the evil that is likely to befall him, if the said conviction is not suspended, has set aside the impugned order dated 08.04.2008. In the case on hand, as rightly contended by the learned Senior Counsel for the petitioner, the petitioner has only prayed for the relief of suspending the sentence and not the conviction.

10.No doubt, as rightly contended by the learned counsel for the petitioner, this Court is having ample power and discretion to suspend the sentence, but that discretion has to be exercised judiciously depending on the facts and circumstances of each case. While considering the suspension of sentence, each case is to be considered on the basis of nature of the offence, manner in which occurrence had taken place, whether in any manner bail granted earlier had been misused. No doubt, there is no straight jacket formula that can be applied in exercising the discretion and the facts and circumstances of each cases, will govern the exercise of judicial discretion, while deciding the application under Section 389 of Cr.P.C.

11.According to the prosecution, the petitioner and other accused had caused the loss of to the tune of Rs.1,08,07,599/- to the State Bank of India, Pudukkottai Branch and obtained corresponding wrongful gain to themselves. It is pertinent to mention that the money alleged to have been looted by the petitioner and other accused is Public Money. Admittedly, there were charges of impersonation, forgery, using forged documents as genuine documents and cheating. No doubt, considering the judgment of the trial Court and the contentions raised by the petitioner in the appeal memorandum, this Court is of the view that certain arguable points are involved in the criminal appeal and this court is also aware of the fact that the above appeal will take some time for disposal, but the above aspects by themselves cannot be considered as valid reasons or grounds sufficient enough to suspend the sentence imposed on the petitioner.

12.One other important point to be noted is that the trial Court has passed the impugned judgment of conviction only on 15.12.2020 and hardly five weeks have elapsed. The learned Senior Counsel would contend that in the main case in C.C.No.4 of 2006, this Court, in all the six appeals preferred against the judgment of conviction dated 17.03.2017, passed by the learned II Additional District Judge for CBI Cases,Madurai has granted appeal bail and suspended the substantial sentence vide common order dated 23.01.2018. As rightly pointed out by the learned counsel for the respondent, those six accused were granted appeal bail only after ten months.

13.When the other accused, after suffering the imprisonment for more than ten months, were granted appeal bail, granting of order for suspension of sentence and appeal bail for the main accused within five weeks of the imprisonment, would only transmit wrong signal and the same would not be in the interest of justice and the society at large. According to the prosecution, the present petitioner is the kingpin of the case and the trial Court in its judgment has referred the petitioner as the master-mind behind the offence. The planning, manner and the mode, in which, the public money was allegedly swindled is very much shocking and appalling. It is pertinent to mention that since the petitioner had remained absconding, the case was ordered to be split up and the main case was proceeded and disposed of. After securing the petitioner, the present case in C.C.No.7 of 2006 was tried.

14.Considering the nature and seriousness of the charges allegedly levelled and proved, the quantum of the amount involved and the period of imprisonment undergone and also the fact that the petitioner is shown as the kingpin and mastermind behind the entire transactions by the prosecution as well as by the trial Court and also the abscondingness at the relevant point of time, this Court is of the view that this is not a fit case to grant the suspension of sentence and enlarge the petitioner on bail. Hence, this Court decides that the Criminal Miscellaneous Petition is devoid of merits and the same is liable to be dismissed and the above point is answered accordingly.

15.In this result, this Criminal Miscellaneous petition is dismissed.

sd/-
27/01/2021

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/ /2021
Sub-Assistant Registrar (C.S.)
Madurai Bench of Madras High Court,
Madurai - 625 023.

TO

1. THE II ADDITIONAL DISTRICT JUDGE(CBI CASES),
   MADURAI.

2. THE SUPERINTENDENT,
   CENTRAL PRISON,
   MADURAI.

3. THE INSPECTOR OF POLICE
   SPE/CBI/EOW,
   CHENNAI.

4. THE SPECIAL PUBLIC PROSECUTOR FOR CBI CASES,
   MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT,
   MADURAI.

ORDER
IN
CRL MP(MD) No.7709 of 2020 IN
CRL A(MD) No.381 of 2020
Date :27/01/2021

DAS
SRS/JC/SAR-II/02.02.2021/6P/5C