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IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED : 25 / 04 / 2022

CORAM

THE HON'BLE MR.JUSTICE M.GOVINDARAJ

WP NO.34464 OF 2012

AND MP NO.1 OF 2012

J.Sujatha

... Petitioner

VS.

The Revenue Divisional Officer
Perambalur,
Perambalur District.

... Respondent

PRAYER: Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India praying for issuance of Writ of Certiorari, calling for the records pertaining to the respondent's show cause notices bearing Na.Ka.அ1/8168/2012 dated 29.10.2012, 09.11.2012 and 04.12.2012 pertaining to the stone quarry bearing S.F.No.172 (Block-2) admeasuring 1.00.0 Hectare in Padalur (East) Village, Kunnam Taluk, Perambalur District, quash the same.

For Petitioner :Mr.V.Sanjeevi

For Respondent :Mr.K.M.D.Muhilan
Government Advocate

O R D E R

In this writ petition, the show cause notices dated 29.10.2012, 09.11.2012 and 04.12.2012 issued by the respondent are put to challenge.

2.From a reading of the show cause notices, it is seen that on an inspection conducted by the respondent, it was found that the Licensee / petitioner had unauthorisedly quarried 70953 cubic meters of the minerals and transported the same without permission and therefore, as to why penalty proceedings shall not be initiated as per Rule 36-A of the Tamil Nadu Minor Mineral Concession Rules, 1959. From a reading of the above show cause notice, it is very clear that the respondent has pre-determined that the Licensee has committed an offence of unauthorised quarrying and transportation of the minerals,



without giving an opportunity to the petitioner before arriving at the finding. Before pre-determining the issue, the show cause notice with regard to imposition of penalty of proceedings was issued.

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3. Heard the submissions made on either side and perused the materials available on record.

4. The learned Government Advocate for the respondent would rely on the following judgments in support of his contention:-

(i) Judgment of this Court in SIVA BLUE METALS VS. DISTRICT COLLECTOR [2012 SCC ONLINE MAD 481] wherein it is observed as under:

"2. By virtue of the show cause, dated 14.09.2011, of the RDO/R2, the petitioner was called upon to submit his explanation as to why he should not be directed to pay Rs.2,21,48,000/-, Rs.20,76,375/- and Rs.25,000/- towards cost of the mineral quarried more than the permitted limit, seigniorage fee and penalty respectively; while, by way of the show cause notice, dated 24.09.2011, issued by the District Collector/R1, the petitioner was required to submit his explanation on the alleged violations of Rule-36(5)(b) of the Tamil Nadu Minor Mineral Concession Rules, 1959 (hereinafter referred to as the 'Rules'), liable for action under Section 36 (5)(h) of the Rules which may result in cancellation of the lease.

.....

3.F) As regards pre-determination, a decision of the Apex Court in Siemens Ltd. v. State of Maharashtra (2006 (12) SCC 33) and that of a Division Bench of this Court in Messrs. Madurai Metal Industries v. Union of India (1991 Writ Law Reporter 59) have been pressed into service to highlight the legal position that if a show cause notice is issued with premeditation, a writ petition would be maintainable and that a show cause notice indicating a pre-conceived or pre-judged and foreclosed mind on the part of the authorities would get vitiated automatically. In the present case, the RDO, based on mere recommendations of



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the Assistant Director (G & M) decided to levy the exorbitant penalty on untenable allegations against the petitioner and that is why, the charges that would be levied are clearly spelt out in the first show cause notice, suggesting a definite pre-conceived notion. The same being the trait of the second show cause notice, both are liable to be interfered with in these writ proceedings.

4. Per contra, learned Additional Advocate General appearing for the respondents, by referring to the stand taken by the respondents in the counter affidavit, at the first instance, submitted that both the writ petitions are totally misconceived and liable to be dismissed as the same being premature, of course, with a direction to the petitioner to submit their explanation to the show cause notices. According to him, for the show cause notice on the alleged violation of Rule-36(5b) which allegation may, if found to have been established, warrants cancellation of licence under Rule 36 (5h) of the Rules, the petitioner can very well submit his explanation refuting the allegations and in the event of such explanation being satisfactory, there are also prospects of the authorities dropping any further proceedings by accepting the case of the petitioner. But, no such genuine attempt was ever made by the petitioner, instead, he has rushed to this Court with the present petitions as if everything was concluded against him by the authorities.

...

9. Before winding up, the other argument of the learned counsel for the petitioner stating that copies of the reports, dated 13.08.2011, of the Panchayat Land Surveyor, the Village Administrative Officer and the Assistant Director (G & M) have not been furnished with, enabling the petitioner to submit a detailed reply, has to be dealt with. This Court is conscious of the fact that non-supply of any document prepared behind the back of the petitioner and containing minute details in depth should be viewed seriously as it would result in great prejudice to the petitioner since he would be deprived of



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making an effective explanation. But, in the present case, as I have already pointed out, the entire inspection proceedings, dated 13.08.2011, were carried out by a battery of officials not as a surprise inspection or without the knowledge of the petitioner, for, the Manager of the petitioner was very much present in the course of the proceedings. Further, in the case on hand, learned Additional Advocate General convinced this Court that the full-fledge details collected from the very records of the petitioner were reflected in the show cause notice only to enable the petitioner to reply exhaustively and properly. More over, now, all the documents said to have been withheld from being furnished to the petitioner have been filed herein as typed set of papers by the Special Government Pleader and, it could be seen that a copy of the said typed set has been received by the petitioner's counsel on 21.11.2011 after making an endorsement. That being so, with the available exhaustive materials, what remains for the petitioner is to submit their explanation for the show cause notices within a stipulated time. "

(ii) Judgment of this Court in M/S.RPR GRANITES VS. THE STATE OF TAMIL NADU [2014 SCC ONLINE MAD 6509] wherein it is observed as under:

"7.7. The learned Special Government Pleader also submitted that the writ petition against show-cause notice is not maintainable and he heavily relied on the judgment of the Apex Court in Union of India and another Vs. Kunisetty Satyanarayana reported in 2006 (12) SCC 28. 7.8. The learned Special Government Pleader submitted that the writ petitions are premature one and they deserve to be dismissed.

9. The following issues arise for consideration in these writ petitions :

(I). Whether the first respondent has got power and jurisdiction to issue the impugned show-cause notices under Section 4-A(4) of the Act or the second respondent has power to initiate proceeding under Section 4-A(4) of the Act ?



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(II). Whether the show-cause notices are liable to be quashed for not enclosing the inspection reports, reports of the District Collector based on those inspection reports, the letters of the Commissioner of Geology and Mining endorsing the reports of the District Collector ?

(III). Whether the show-cause notices are liable to be interfered with, as the inspection of the quarry sites was done without prior notice to the petitioners and the impugned notices are based on such inspection reports?

(IV). Whether the first respondent pre-determined that the petitioners violated Section 4-A(4) of the Act and therefore, the impugned show-cause notices are liable to be interfered with for pre-judging the issue? and (V). Whether the writ petition is maintainable against a show-cause notice ?

12.1. It is a different matter, if the petitioners requested for the supply of those copies of documents and the first respondent refused to furnish the same. It is not so. The petitioners did not make any such request. It is also a different matter, if the final decision is arrived at by the authorities without furnishing the reports, relied on by them in the show-cause notices. The petitioners were merely asked to appear for personal hearing, wherein, the petitioners could have asked to furnish those documents, that are mentioned in the show-cause notices and also any other document, that are relevant, to prove their version. But, instead of doing the same, the petitioners have approached this Court prematurely at the show-cause notices stage itself. Hence, the said complaint of the petitioners has no merit.

12.2. In fact, the learned Special Government Pleader made a statement before the Court that the first respondent is willing to provide those reports and also will afford reasonable opportunity to the petitioners. Hence, this issue is also decided against the petitioners.

17.4. In these writ petitions under consideration, show-cause notices were issued and



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the petitioners were asked to appear for a personal hearing to give objections on the notices and the learned Special Government Pleader also made a statement before this Court that all reasonable opportunity would be given and relevant documents, if any, required by the petitioners would be furnished, if those documents are in the possession of the Department. The petitioners approached this Court at the stage of show-cause notice itself before passing the final orders by the respondent. Hence, I am of the view that the said judgment cannot be applied to these writ petitions and it is premature to approach this Court.

18.35. As stated earlier, I am of the view that on a reasonable reading of the impugned show-cause notices, a person of ordinary prudence would not come to a conclusion that the authority made up his mind and came to a definite conclusion on the guilt of the petitioners. On the other hand, it only directed the petitioners to show-cause as to why action cannot be taken under Section 4-A(4) of the Act based on the reports mentioned therein.

19.4. In these writ petitions under consideration, show-cause notices were issued, the petitioners were asked to appear for personal hearing to give objections and the learned Special Government Pleader also made a statement before this Court that all reasonable opportunity would be given and the reports, that are referred to in the impugned show-cause notices, and other relevant documents, that are required by the petitioners, if any, would be furnished, if those documents are in the possession of the Department. He also stated that adequate opportunity would be given before taking a final decision. Hence, I am of the view that the said judgment cannot be applied to these writ petitions. "

(iii) Judgment of this Court in V.KANDASAMY VS. THE REVENUE DIVISIONAL OFFICER, PERAMBALUR, PERAMBALUR DISTRICT [W.P.NOS.3018 OF 2013 ETC., BATCH DECIDED ON 14.12.2021] wherein it is observed as under:



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by the High Court, undoubtedly, there is a possibility of error, omission or commission which would cause prejudice to either of the parties and it is not desirable. The importance of exhausting of the remedies at no circumstances be undermined by High Court. Such factual findings of those Authorities or statutorily contemplated bodies are of greater assistance to the High Court for the purpose of exercising the power of Judicial Review and thus, the Authorities must be allowed to exercise their adjudicatory powers in all circumstances."

5.To buttress his contention that the petitioner shall avail the remedy of appeal and agitate the matter before the Appellate Authority and without exhausting the alternative remedy available, the petitioner is not entitled to maintain the writ petition, the learned Government Advocate would rely on a judgment of the Division Bench of this Court in P.MARIADOSS VS. THE DISTRICT COLLECTOR AND OTHERS [WP NOS.1015 OF 2011 ETC., BATCH DECIDED ON 26.03.2012] wherein it is observed that the petitioner shall avail the remedy of appeal and agitate the matter before the Appellate Authority.

6.It is relevant to note that the Hon'ble Supreme Court in SIEMENS LTD., VS. STATE OF MAHARASHTRA AND OTHERS [2006 (12) SCC 33] wherein it is observed as under:

"9.Although ordinarily a writ court may not exercise its discretionary jurisdiction in entertaining a writ petition questioning a notice to show cause unless the same inter alia appears to have been without jurisdiction as has been held by this Court in some decisions including State of Uttar Pradesh v. Brahm Datt Sharma and Anr. AIR 1987 SC 943, Special Director and Another v. Mohd. Ghulam Ghouse and Another, (2004) 3 SCC 440 and Union of India and Another v. Kunisetty Satyanarayana, 2006 (12) SCALE 262], but the question herein has to be considered from a different angle, viz, when a notice is issued with pre-meditation, a writ petition would be maintainable. In such an event, even if the courts directs the statutory authority to hear the matter afresh, ordinarily such hearing would not yield any fruitful purpose [See K.I. Shephard and Others v. Union of India and Others (1987) 4 SCC 431 : AIR 1988 SC 686]. It is evident in the instant case that



the respondent has clearly made up its mind. It explicitly said so both in the counter affidavit as also in its purported show cause.

10. The said principle has been followed by this Court in V.C. Banaras Hindu University and Ors. v. Shrikant [2006 (6) SCALE 66], stating:

"48. The Vice Chancellor appears to have made up his mind to impose the punishment of dismissal on the Respondent herein. A post decisional hearing given by the High Court was illusory in this case.

49. In K.I. Shephard & Ors. etc. etc. v. Union of India & Ors. [AIR 1988 SC 686], this Court held :

"It is common experience that once a decision has been taken, there is tendency to uphold it and a representation may not really yield any fruitful purpose."

11. A bare perusal of the order impugned before the High Court as also the statements made before us in the counter affidavit filed by the respondents, we are satisfied that the statutory authority has already applied its mind and has formed an opinion as regards the liability or otherwise of the appellant. If in passing the order the respondent has already determined the liability of the appellant and the only question which remains for its consideration is quantification thereof, the same does not remain in the realm of a show cause notice. The writ petition, in our opinion, was maintainable."

7. It is relevant to note that the Hon'ble Supreme Court in ORYX FISHERIES PRIVATE LIMITED VS. UNION OF INDIA AND OTHERS [2010 (13) SCC 427] has observed as under:

"23. Relying on the underlined portions in the show cause notice, learned counsel for the appellant urged that even at the stage of the show cause notice the third respondent has completely made up his mind and reached definite conclusion about the alleged guilt of the appellant. This has rendered the subsequent proceedings an empty ritual and an idle



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formality.

24. This Court finds that there is a lot of substance in the aforesaid contention. It is well settled that a quasi-judicial authority, while acting in exercise of its statutory power must act fairly and must act with an open mind while initiating a show cause proceeding. A show cause proceeding is meant to give the person proceeded against a reasonable opportunity of making his objection against the proposed charges indicated in the notice.

25. Expressions like "a reasonable opportunity of making objection" or "a reasonable opportunity of defence" have come up for consideration before this Court in the context of several statutes. A Constitution Bench of this Court in *Khem Chand v. Union of India* and others, reported in AIR 1958 SC 300, of course in the context of service jurisprudence, reiterated certain principles which are applicable in the present case also."

8. As per the above judgment, when an Authority has completely made up his mind and reached a definite conclusion about the alleged guilt of the appellant, the subsequent proceedings of appeal, is an empty ritual and an idle formality. A show cause notice is meant to give a person proceeded against a reasonable opportunity of making his objection against the proposed charges indicated in the notice. But, in the instant case, the Authority has already found that the petitioner has unauthorisedly quarried an excess quantity and removed the same and thus, he is liable to be punished. Such a show cause notice with pre-determination is not sustainable in law and is violative of principles of natural justice.

9. In fact, a learned Single Judge of this Court in *N. THAVASI VS. THE DISTRICT COLLECTOR, DINDIGUL DISTRICT AND OTHERS* [WP (MD) NO.513 OF 2013 DECIDED ON 27.08.2019] has relied on the very same judgment of the Division Bench of this Court in *P. MARIADOSS's* case (cited supra) and discussed the same and came to a conclusion that where there is violation of principles of natural justice, the impugned penalty order should be liable to be set aside. In the present case also, the impugned order came to be passed in violation of principles of natural justice and



passed with pre-judged view. Therefore, it is not sustainable in law.

10. Accordingly, the impugned show cause notices bearing Na.Ka. 1/8168/2012 dated 29.10.2012, 09.11.2012 and 04.12.2012 passed by the respondent are set aside and the matter is remitted back to the respondent with a direction to issue fresh show cause notice to the petitioner with specific details and provide ample opportunity of personal hearing to effectively defend her case and thereafter, pass orders on merits and in accordance with law, within a period of twelve (12) weeks from the date of receipt of a copy of this order. It is made clear that if the respondent decides to take measurements again, it shall be made in the presence of the petitioner.

11. In fine, the writ petition is allowed. No costs. Consequently, connected Miscellaneous Petition is closed.

Sd/-

Assistant Registrar (CS III)

//True Copy//

Sub Assistant Registrar

TK

To

The Revenue Divisional Officer
Perambalur,
Perambalur District.

+1 cc to Mr.V.Sanjeevi Advocate sr28061

WP NO.34464 OF 2012

ss(co)

aa01/06/2022