

CRM-M-12891-2020

IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA
AT CHANDIGARH

CRM-M-12891-2020
Reserved on: 08.04.2022
Pronounced on: 07.05.2022

Veer Singh @ Veeru and another ...Petitioners
Versus
State of Punjab ...Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ANOOP CHITKARA

Present: Mr. Ashok Giri, Advocate for the petitioners.

Ms. Jaspreet Kaur, AAG, Punjab.

ANOOP CHITKARA, J.

FIR No.	Dated	Police Station	Sections
181	05.11.2019	Kartarpur, Distt, Jalandhar	22 & 29 of NDPS Act

1. The petitioners, incarcerated upon their arrest for possessing a commercial quantity of 20,500 tablets of Tramadol, in violation of Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS Act), have come up before this Court under Section 439 of CrPC, seeking bail.
2. As per end note (A) of the bail petition, the accused declares that he has no criminal antecedents. However, the documents submitted later, petitioner No.1 had the following criminal history:-

Sr. No.	FIR No.	Dated	Police Station	Sections
1	4	2013	Dera Baba Nanak	22/61/85 of NDPS Act

3. On Nov 05, 2019, the investigator received a secret information that Veer Singh, petitioner no. 1, and Harpal Singh Petitioner no. 2, are in possession of huge quantity of intoxicating tablets. Based on such information, the police apprehended both the persons and registered FIR. On the option of the accused to get their search in the presence of a gazetted officer, a DySP was called at the spot. As per police, due to the reluctance of the people to become independent witnesses, none could be joined and the search was conducted in the presence of DySP. On opening the bag, which was in the possession of the accused, the investigator recovered 2050 strips of Tramadol Hydrochloride tablets, in all 20,500/- tablets.
4. Ld. Counsel for the petitioners contends that the pre-trial incarceration would cause an irreversible injustice to the petitioners and family.
5. While opposing the bail, the contention on behalf of the State is that the quantity of contraband involved in the case falls in the commercial category.

CRM-M-12891-2020REASONING:

6. The substance involved in the present case is 'Tramadol.' Entry no. 238 ZH of the table specifying small and commercial quantities specifies the quantity greater than 250 grams as commercial quantity and lesser than 5 grams as small. Thus, the quantity allegedly involved in this case is commercial. Given this, the rigours of S. 37 of the NDPS Act apply in the present case. The burden is on the petitioners to satisfy the twin conditions put in place by the Legislature under Section 37 of the NDPS Act.

7. The petition states that the accused is entitled to bail because of the non-examination of independent witnesses. However, this plea would gather force only when the accused establishes after cross-examination that the police deliberately did not associate any independent witness even when they could have been made available, and in the facts and circumstances peculiar to this case, the argument does not satisfy the requirements of section 37 of NDPS Act.

8. In State of Punjab v Baldev Singh, (1999) 6 SCC 172, the Constitutional bench of Hon'ble Supreme Court holds,

[14]. The provisions of Sections 100 and 165 Cr.P.C. are not inconsistent with the provisions of the NDPS Act and are applicable for effecting search, seizure or arrest under the NDPS Act also. However, when an empowered officer carrying on the investigation including search, seizure or arrest under the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure comes across a person being in possession of the narcotic drugs or the psychotropic substance, then he must follow from that stage onwards the provisions of the NDPS Act and continue the investigation as provided thereunder. If the investigating officer is not an empowered officer then it is expected of him that he must inform the empowered officer under the NDPS Act, who should thereafter proceed from the stage in accordance with the provisions of the NDPS Act. In Balbir Singh's case after referring to a number of judgments, the Bench opined that failure to comply with the provisions of Cr.P.C. in respect of search and seizure and particularly those of Sections 100, 102, 103 and 165 *per se* does not vitiate the prosecution case. If there is such a violation, what the courts have to see is whether any prejudice was caused to the accused. While appreciating the evidence and other relevant factors, the courts should bear in mind that there was such a violation and evaluate the evidence on record keeping that in view.

9. The petition states that the quantity of substance allegedly recovered is marginally above the commercial quantity. This submission is more compassionate than legal. Once the quantity is greater than commercial, it is immaterial for the purpose of bail. Once it is in statute, Judges have no latitude. Given the legislative mandate under section 37 of the NDPS Act, an accused is not entitled to bail if the quantity is marginally above the commercial quantity.

CRM-M-12891-2020

10. Ld. counsel for the petitioners submits that the investigator conducted search and seizure violating sections 42 and 50 of the NDPS.

11. Whether the Investigator complied with the mandatory provisions of sections 42 and 50 of the NDPS Act is a question of fact to be adjudicated in the trial. However, before this court treats the compliances as illegal, the prosecution needs an opportunity to prove that they had complied with the mandatory provisions per law. Such stage would come only during the trial and certainly not at the bail stage, where it would be hit by the maxim *Audi alteram partem*. The exception to this would be applicable only when the non-compliance of the mandatory provisions of sections 42 and 50 of the NDPS Act is apparent on the face of the special report under section 57 of the NDPS Act and other documents of search and seizure, and in the opinion of the court, the lapse is non-rectifiable, after recording a finding that it is an incurable defect, the court might consider granting bail on such violations.

12. In State of H.P. v. Prithi Chand, (1996) 2 SCC 37, Hon'ble Supreme Court holds,

[3]. The question is whether the learned Sessions Judge was justified, at the stage of taking cognizance of the offence, in discharging the accused, even before the trial was conducted on merits, on the ground that the provisions of Section 50 of the Act had not been complied with. This Court in *State of Punjab v. Balbir Singh* [(1994) 3 SCC 299] : (AIR 1994 SCW 1802) has considered the provisions of the Act. Section 50 has been held to be mandatory. In paragraph 16, this Court has held that it is obligatory on the part of the empowered or the authorised officer to inform the suspect that, if so required, he would be produced before a Gazetted Officer or a Magistrate and search would be conducted in his presence. It was imperative on the part of the Officer to inform the person of the above right and if he failed to do the same, it amounted to violation of the requirement of Section 50 of the Act. It was held that when the person was searched he must have been aware of his right and that it could be done only if the authorised or empowered Officer informed him of the same. Accordingly, this Court by implication read the obligation on the part of authorised Officer to inform the person to be searched of his right to information that he could be searched in the presence of the Gazetted Officer or the Magistrate. In *Saiyad Mohd. Saiyaad Umar Saiyed v. State of Gujarat* [1995(3) JT SC 489] a three-Judge Bench of this Court had reiterated the above view and held that having regard to the grave consequences that might entail the possession of illicit articles under the Act, viz., the shifting of the onus to the accused and the severe punishment to which he became liable, the Legislature had enacted safeguards contained in Section 50. Compliance of the safeguards in Section 50 is mandatory obliging the Officer concerned to inform the person to be searched of his right to demand that search could be conducted in the presence of a Gazetted Officer or a Magistrate. The possession of illicit article has to be satisfactorily established before the Court. The Officer who conducts search must state in his evidence that he had informed the accused of his right to demand, while he is searched, in the presence of a Gazetted Officer or a Magistrate and that the accused had not chosen to so demand. If no evidence to that effect is given, the Court

CRM-M-12891-2020

must presume that the person searched was not informed of the protection the law gives him and must find that possession of illicit articles was not established. The presumption under Article 114, illustration (e) of the Evidence Act, that the official duty was properly performed, therefore, does not apply. It is the duty of the Court to carefully scrutinise the evidence and satisfy that the accused had been informed by the concerned Officer that he had a right to be searched before a Gazetted Officer or a Magistrate and that the person had not chosen to so demand.

[4]. It is to be seen whether the accused has been afforded such a right and whether the authorised Officer has violated the mandatory requirement, as a question of fact, has to be proved at the trial. In *Pooran Mal v. Director of Inspection* [(1974) 1 SCC 345] : (AIR 1974 SC 348) a Constitution Bench of this Court had held that power of search and seizure, is, in any system of jurisprudence, an overriding power of the State for the protection of social security and that power is necessarily regulated by law. A search by itself is not a restriction on the right to hold and enjoy property, though seizure is a temporary restriction to the right of possession and enjoyment of the property seized. However, the seizure will be only temporary and limited for the purpose of the investigation. The power of search and seizure is an accepted norm in our criminal law envisaged in Sections 96 to 103 and 165 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 [for short, "the Code"]. The Evidence Act permits relevancy as the only test of admissibility of evidence. The evidence obtained under an illegal search and seizure does not exclude relevant evidence on that ground. It is wrong to invoke the spirit of Constitution to exclude such evidence. The decisions of the American Supreme Court spelling out certain Constitutional protections in regard to search and seizure are not applicable to exclude the evidence obtained on an illegal search. Courts in India refuse to exclude relevant evidence merely on the ground that it is obtained by illegal search and seizure. When the test of admissibility of evidence lies in relevancy, unless there is an express or necessarily implied prohibition in the Constitution or other law, evidence obtained as a result of illegal search and seizure, is not liable to be shut out. Search and seizure are not a new weapon in the armoury of those whose duty it is to maintain social security in its broadest sense. If the safeguards are generally on the lines adopted by the Code, they would be regarded as adequate and render the restrictions imposed as reasonable measures.

[7]. It would thus be settled law that every deviation from the details of the procedure prescribed for search, does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that search by the police renders the recovery of the articles pursuant to the illegal search, irrelevant evidence nor the discovery of the fact inadmissible at the trial. Weight to be attached to such evidence depends on facts and circumstances in each case. The Court is required to scan the evidence with care and to act upon it when it is proved and the Court would hold that the evidence would be relied upon.

13. Ld. counsel stated that only a few tablets were sent for examination as such it cannot be said that the entire quantity falls in commercial. However, this argument is not factually correct. As per the status report, the strips contained two batch numbers, i.e. 19230 & 19267. Thus, the entire recovered tablets were part of either of these

CRM-M-12891-2020

batches. Whether the tablets sent for testing belonged to a batch, whose tablets would fall less than commercial quantity, is a question fact to be established during the trial.

14. The stand that the accused is in custody for sufficient time is also not a legal ground to overcome the rigors of S. 37 of the NDPS Act at this stage.

15. The grounds taken in the bail petition do not shift the burden placed by the legislature on the accused under S. 37 of the NDPS Act. The petitioners have not stated anything to discharge the burden put by the stringent conditions placed in the statute by the legislature under section 37 of the NDPS Act. Thus, the petitioners have failed to make a case for bail at this stage.

16. In the facts and circumstances peculiar to this case, and for the reasons mentioned above, the petitioners fail to make a case for bail at this stage.

17. Any observation made hereinabove is neither an expression of opinion on the merits of the case nor shall the trial Court advert to these comments.

Petition dismissed in aforesaid terms. All pending applications, if any, stand disposed.

(ANOOP CHITKARA)
JUDGE

07.05.2022
anju rani

Whether speaking/reasoned:	Yes
Whether reportable:	No.