



W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

BEFORE THE MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT

DATED: 10.03.2023

CORAM:

THE HONOURABLE MS.JUSTICE P.T.ASHA

W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

and

W.M.P.(MD) No.4766 of 2023

Tharmaraj

.. Petitioner

Vs.

1.The Regional Transport Officer,
Regional Transport Office,
Pudukottai District.

2.The Inspector of Police,
Thirumayam Police Station,
Pudukottai District.

.. Respondents

Prayer :- Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, praying for issuance of Writ of Mandamus, directing the 1st respondent to return back the original driving license of the petitioner (TN-47-Z-20100000067) to him forthwith and within a time frame that may be fixed by this Court.



W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

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For Petitioner : Mr.R.Maheswaran
For R1 : Mr.T.Amjadkhan
Government Advocate
For R2 : Mr.M.Vaikkam Karunanithi
Government Advocate

ORDER

This Writ Petition has been filed praying for a Writ of Mandamus to direct the first respondent to return the petitioner's original driving license bearing TN-47-Z-20100000067 forthwith.

2. Mr.T.Amjadkhan, learned Government Advocate takes notice for the first respondent and Mr.M.Vaikkam Karunanithi, learned Government Advocate takes notice for the second respondent.

3. The question that falls for consideration in this petition is as to whether the 1st respondent has power to impound the driving licence of a person involved in a road traffic accident.



W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

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4. The learned counsel for the petitioner submitted that on 25.01.2023, the bus, driven by the petitioner herein, was involved in a road traffic accident resulting in death of persons in the two wheeler. Pursuant to which, an FIR in Crime No.33 of 2023 came to be registered by the second respondent/Police for offences under Sections 279 and 304(A) IPC. Thereafter, the petitioner's license was seized by the second respondent and the same was handed over to the first respondent.

5. The learned counsel for the petitioner further submitted that till date, no show cause notice was issued to the petitioner and the petitioner was issued with proceedings dated 30.01.2023 temporarily suspending him for a period of 30 days and the petitioner has submitted his representation dated 06.02.2023 not to disqualify his driving licence and the same is pending consideration. It is further submitted by the learned counsel for the petitioner that the question that is raised in this Writ Petition stands covered by a decision of a Division Bench of this Court in W.A.No.176 of 2009 and the said judgment is being followed consistently by this Court.



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6. At this juncture, it may be relevant to refer to the following portions of the said judgment, which read as under:

"6. Section 19(1) of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, empowers the Licensing Authority to disqualify a person for holding or obtaining any driving licence for a specified period or to revoke any such licence. Similarly, a Court which convicts a person for an offence under the Act, is empowered by Section 20(1) to disqualify such person from holding a driving licence for a specific period. Section 21 makes a driving licence become suspended, if the holder of the licence had been previously convicted of an offence punishable under Section 184 and a case had been registered against him on the allegation of causing the death or grievous injury to one or more persons by dangerous driving. Section 22 empowers the Court to cancel or suspend the driving licence, upon conviction of a person for an offence under Section 184.

7. Obviously, Sections 20 and 22 are not applicable to the case on hand, since the action impugned in the writ petition did not arise out of the disqualification ordered by a Court. There is no allegation that the appellant was previously convicted for an offence under Section 184. Therefore, Section 21 also has no application to the case on hand. Consequently, the only provision to which the respondent could restore to, is Section 19.

8. Section 19 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, reads as follows:-

"19. Power of licensing authority to disqualify from holding a driving licence or revoke such licence.

(1) If a licensing authority is satisfied, after giving the holder of a driving licence an opportunity of being heard, that he-



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W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

(a) is a habitual criminal or a habitual drunkard; or

(b) is a habitual addict to any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance within the meaning of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (61 of 1985); or

(c) is using or has used a motor vehicle in the commission of a cognizable offence; or

(d) has by his previous conduct as driver of a motor vehicle shown that his driving is likely to be attended with danger to the public; or

(e) has obtained any driving licence or a licence to drive a particular class or description of motor vehicle by fraud or misrepresentation; or

(f) has committed any such act which is likely to cause nuisance or danger to the public, as may be prescribed by the Central Government, having regard to the objects of this Act; or

(g) has failed to submit to, or has not passed, the tests referred to in the proviso to sub-section (3) of section 22; or

(h) being a person under the age of eighteen years who has been granted a learner's licence or a driving licence with the consent in writing of the person having the care of the holder of the licence and has ceased to be in such care, it may, for reasons to be recorded in writing, make an order-

(i) disqualifying that person for a specified period for holding or obtaining any driving licence to drive all or any classes or descriptions of vehicles specified in the licence; or

(ii) revoke any such licence.

(2) Where an order under sub-section (1) is made, the holder of a driving licence shall



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W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

forthwith surrender his driving licence to the licensing authority making the order, if the driving licence has not already been surrendered, and the licensing authority shall,-

(a) if the driving licence is a driving licence issued under this Act, keep it until the disqualification has expired or has been removed; or

(b) if it is not a driving licence issued under this Act, endorse the disqualification upon it and send it to the licensing authority by which it was issued; or

(c) in the case of revocation of any licence, endorse the revocation upon it and if it is not the authority which issued the same, intimate the fact of revocation to the authority which issued that licence:

Provided that where the driving licence of a person authorises him to drive more than one class or description of motor vehicles and the order, made under sub-section (1), disqualifies him from driving any specified class or description of motor vehicles, the licensing authority shall endorse the disqualification upon the driving licence and return the same to the holder.

(3) Any person aggrieved by an order made by a licensing authority under sub-section (1) may, within thirty days of the receipt of the order, appeal to the prescribed authority, and such appellate authority shall give notice to the licensing authority and hear either party if so required by that party and may pass such order as it thinks fit and an order passed by any such appellate authority shall be final.”

9.A bare reading of Section 19(1) shows that the Licensing Authority has the power to revoke any licence



or disqualify a person for a specified period from holding or obtaining a driving licence, if any of the contingencies prescribed in Clauses (a) to (h) of Sub Section (1) of Section 19 arises. Moreover, the power under Section 19(1) can be invoked only after giving an opportunity of being heard to the holder of the licence and for reasons to be recorded in writing.

10. But in the case on hand, the licence of the appellant has been impounded or retained by the respondent, immediately after the accident on 18.3.2009. Admittedly, the show cause notice was issued only on 28.4.2009. Therefore, it is clear that the driving licence was retained, both without an order in writing and without affording an opportunity of being heard to the appellant. This is a clear violation of the provisions of the statute and hence the order of the learned Judge, dismissing the writ petition deserves to be set aside.'

7. Furthermore, it may also be useful to refer to the order of this Court in W.P.(MD) No.5635 of 2021, wherein this Court after holding that impounding of licence in similar circumstances is unsustainable, held as follows:

“.....That apart when neither the Criminal Court nor the Claims Tribunal have pronounced on the guilt of the petitioner, the second respondent has chosen to prejudge the issue. The petitioner was also not given any opportunity of personal hearing, though it is specifically contemplated by Section 19(1) of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.



W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

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8. This Court finds that issuance of show cause notice after impounding the licence was held to be impermissible by the Division Bench of this Court. In the case on hand, till date no show cause notice was issued to the petitioner. In view of the same, the 1st respondent is directed to return the driving licence of the petitioner, within a week from the date of receipt of a copy of this order. However, it shall not preclude the 1st respondent from proceeding further with the proceedings already initiated, if any of the contingencies specified in Clauses (a) to (h) of Section 19(1) of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 has arisen or if any of the Rules as prescribed by the Central Government in pursuance of Section 19(1)(f) are violated after affording opportunity to the petitioner in the manner contemplated under Section 19 of the Motor Vehicles Act.

9. With the above directions, this Writ Petition is allowed. No costs. Consequently, connected Miscellaneous Petition is closed.

10.03.2023

NCC : Yes/No
Index : Yes/No
Internet : Yes
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W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

To

- 1.The Regional Transport Officer,
Regional Transport Office,
Pudukottai District.
- 2.The Inspector of Police,
Thirumayam Police Station,
Pudukottai District.



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W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

P.T.ASHA, J.

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W.P.(MD) No.5072 of 2023

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