

CRM-M-3374-2022

IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA
AT CHANDIGARH

CRM-M-3374-2022
Reserved on: 18.04.2023
Pronounced on: 11.05.2023

Gardawar alias Tarsem Singh ...Petitioner
Versus
State of Punjab ...Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ANOOP CHITKARA

Present: Mr. M.S. Saini, Advocate for the petitioner.

Mr. Virat Rana, AAG, Punjab.

ANOOP CHITKARA, J.

FIR No.	Dated	Police Station	Sections
0171	06.10.2021	Mahilpur, District Hoshiarpur, Punjab	15/18 of NDPS Act 1985

1. The petitioner incarcerated for violating the above-mentioned provisions of Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS Act) per the FIR captioned above, on the allegations of recovery of 90 kgs of poppyhusk and 400 grams of opium from his cattle shed constructed near a rivulet, on Oct 6, 2021, and after his arrest recovery of 15 kg of poppy husk on Oct 17, 2021, had come up before this Court under Section 439 CrPC seeking bail.
2. In paragraph 15 of the bail petition, the accused declares that he has no criminal antecedents.
3. The petitioner contends that the pre-trial incarceration would cause an irreversible injustice to the petitioner and family.
4. 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.

REASONING:

5. On 6th October 2021, the SHO of the above-captioned police station, under the supervision of the Additional Superintendent of Police was patrolling where he received secret information that the petitioner indulges in selling drugs from his cattle shed in the village. The informant further said that he keeps intoxicants by concealing them in cattle-shed constructed on the banks of a creek. On this, the police team raided the premises, and before that, they tried to find independent witnesses. However, none appeared or agreed to join. After that, they started to search. On seeing the police officials, the petitioner-Gardawar Singh fled away, taking advantage of bushes;

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however, one person Darshan Singh was apprehended, and in his presence, the police recovered 90 kilograms of poppy husk and 400 grams of opium. Subsequently, the FIR was registered against the petitioner and other accomplices. On 17th October 2021, after his arrest, the petitioner disclosed the concealment of 15 kilograms of puppy Husk, and police recovered the same. Overall, police had recovered one hundred 105 kilograms of puppy husk and 400 grams of opium allegedly from the petitioner's property, of which the police got evidence of him being in conscious and physical possession along with other accused. FSL tested the substance and found the same poppy straw and opium.

6. NDPS Act defines dealing in 105 kg of poppy-straw, in contravention of the Act as a penal offence, in the following terms:

Substance Name	Poppy straw
Quantity detained	105 Kg
Quantity type	Commercial
Drug Quantity in % to upper limit of Intermediate	210.00%

Specified as small & Commercial in S.2(viia) & 2(xxiii) NDPS Act, 1985	
Notification No	S.O.1055(E)
dated	10/19/2001
Sr. No.	110
Common Name (Name of Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substance (International non-proprietary name (INN)	Poppy straw
Other non-proprietary name	*****
Chemical Name	*****
Small Quantity	1000 Gram (i.e. equivalent to 1 Kg)
Commercial Quantity	50000 Gram (i.e. equivalent to 50 Kg)

Declared as punishable under NDPS Act and as per schedule defined in S.2(xi) & 2(xxiii) NDPS Act, 1985	
Notification No	S.15 & S.2(xviii) NDPS Act, S.O.821(E)
dated	11/14/1985
Sr. No.	S.2(xviii)
Common Name (Name of Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substance (International non-proprietary name (INN)	*****
Other non-proprietary name	*****
Chemical Name	S.2(xviii) “poppy straw” means all parts (except the seeds) of the opium poppy after harvesting whether in their original form or cut, crushed or powdered and whether or not juice has been extracted therefrom; S. 2(viib)] “illicit traffic”, in relation to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances,

	means— (i) cultivating any coca plant or gathering any portion of coca plant; (ii) cultivating the opium poppy or any cannabis plant; (iii) engaging in the production, manufacture, possession, sale, purchase, transportation, warehousing, concealment, use or consumption, import inter-State, export inter-State, import into India, export from India or transshipment, of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances; S.2 (xvii) “opium poppy” means— (a) the plant of the species Papaver somniferum L; and (b) the plant of any other species of Papaver from which opium or any phenanthrene alkaloid can be extracted and which the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, declare to be opium poppy for the purposes of this Act; S2. (xviii) “poppy straw” means all parts (except the seeds) of the opium poppy after harvesting whether in their original form or cut, crushed or powdered and whether or not juice has been extracted therefrom;
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7. The quantity of poppy husk is commercial, 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 petitioner to satisfy the twin conditions put in place by the Legislature under Section 37 of the NDPS Act.

8. The petition states that the petitioner was not arrested from the spot as such the recovery cannot be linked to him and further that the police did not join independent witnesses. On this, the response of the State is that police personnel knew the petitioner and had seen him fleeing from the spot on noticing the police raid, as such his conduct implicates him. and that the police had tried to associate independent witnesses, but because of the petitioner's clout, none agreed to become a witness. Given the nature of evidence, 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.

9. 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.

10. Based on paragraph 4 of the petition, counsel for the petitioner submits that the investigator conducted search and seizure violating section 42 of the NDPS.

11. Whether the Investigator complied with the mandatory provisions of section 42 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 section 42 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 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. 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.

14. 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 petitioner has 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 petitioner has failed to make a case for bail at this stage.

15. A perusal of the bail petition and the documents attached, prima facie points towards the petitioner's involvement and does not make out a case for bail. Any further discussions are likely to prejudice the petitioner; this court refrains from doing so.

16. 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 terms mentioned above. However, considering the petitioner's custody, the ends of justice will meet by expediting the trial. Given above, considering the petitioner's custody, this court requests the concerned trial court to make all endeavours to conclude the trial by Sep 30, 2023, of which the prosecution evidence be completed by Aug 31, 2023, and the remaining time to provide an opportunity to the accused to lead defence evidence, if so desired. It is clarified that this order expediting the trial is subject to the condition that neither the petitioner shall seek any adjournment nor try to use any tactics to delay the trial. If they do so, this order of expediting the trial shall stand automatically recalled by resorting to Section 362, read with Section 482 Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, without any further reference to this court. All pending applications, if any, stand disposed of.

(ANOOP CHITKARA)
JUDGE

11.05.2023
anju rani

Whether speaking/reasoned:	Yes
Whether reportable:	No.