

IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA
AT CHANDIGARH

434

CRA-S-2254-SB-2004 (O&M)
Decided on :11.04.2023

SANTOKH SINGH

. . . Appellant(s)

Versus

STATE OF PUNJAB

. . . Respondent(s)

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SANJAY VASHISTH

PRESENT: Mr. Ananya Bhardwaj, Advocate for
Mr. D. N. Ganeriwala, Advocate for the appellant.

Mr. J. S. Arora, DAG, Punjab.

SANJAY VASHISTH, J. (Oral)

1. Appellant – Santokh Singh, aged 35 years (at the time of conviction), has filed the present appeal challenging judgment of conviction and order of sentence dated 05.11.2004, passed by Judge Special Court, Rupnagar, in Sessions Case No.4/8.01.2003, arising from FIR No. 84 dated 29.09.2002 under Sections 15 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (for short, 'NDPS Act'), registered at Police Station Chamkaur Sahib.

2. On 29.09.2002, in the area of Bhairon Majra, appellant was found in possession of 10 kg 500 grams of contraband, which was kept in a plastic bag. After completing formalities, investigation and receipt of FSL report E.x PH, seized contraband was declared that of poppy husk. Accordingly, appellant – Santokh Singh, was put to trial. He was charged for the offence punishable under Section 15 of the NDPS Act. Eventually, learned Trial Court held the appellant guilty of the offence, vide judgment of conviction dated 05.11.2004 and vide separate order of sentence of even date i.e. order dated 05.11.2004, he was sentenced as under:-

Under Section(s)	Sentence	Fine	In Default
15 of NDPS Act	06 months R. I.	Rs. 10,000/-	03 months R. I.

Appeal was admitted on 19.11.2004, recovery of fine was stayed and after noticing the factum of total undergone period inside jail, remaining sentence of the appellant was suspended by this Court.

4. At the final hearing of the appeal today, learned counsel for the appellant submits that appellant has reformed himself by rehabilitating in the society, as he has never got involved in any other case of similar nature despite being on bail since the time of conviction by learned trial Court. Thus, he submits that sending the appellant behind the bars after more than 19 years of period may spoil his and his family members’ complete future career and thus, a sympathetic view may be taken qua the sentence part, without therebeing any challenge by the appellant qua the conviction.

5. Learned State counsel has furnished custody certificate dated 11.03.2023, which is already on record. As per said custody certificate, appellant had remained inside jail for about 17 days, however, except present case, there is nothing mentioned about the registration of any other case. Thus, learned State counsel agrees on the issue that except present case, in which appellant is convicted, there is no such instance of recovery from the appellant of any contra-band, covered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act.

6. I have heard learned counsel for the parties and with their able assistance gone through the record.

7. This Court has examined the submissions addressed by learned counsel from both the sides and also perused the custody certificate dated 11.03.2023, and has noticed that except the present case, appellant is not involved in any other criminal case.

8. Another noticeable aspect is that after release of the appellant on bail, vide order dated 19.11.2004, by this Court, he was never found indulged in any other similar activity, which shows that with the passage of time, appellant has adopted the principles of reformatory theory, which otherwise also sends a direct message to reform oneself, despite facing conviction in a criminal case.

9. On the issue of reformatory theory in context to any wrong doer, His Lordship V.R. Krishna Iyer, J., of Hon'ble Apex Court, in case titled as **Mohammad Giasuddin v. State of Andhra Pradesh**, (1977) 3 SCC 287, has observed as under:-

“5. If every saint has a past, every sinner has a future, and it is the role of law to remind both of this. The Indian legal genius of old has made a healthy contribution to the word treasury of criminology. The drawback of our criminal process is that often they are built on the bricks of impressionist opinions and dated values. Ignoring empirical studies and deeper researches.” (emphasis added)

10. In case titled as **Satish @ Sabbe v. State of Uttar Pradesh** (Special Leave Petition (Crl.) No. 7369 of 2019, decided on 30.09.2020 : Law Finder Doc ID # 1746022), His Lordship Surya Kant, J., says as:

“Whilst it is undoubtedly true that society has a right to lead a peaceful and fearless life, without free-roaming criminals creating havoc in the lives of ordinary peace-loving citizens. But equally strong is the foundation of reformatory theory which propounds that a civilised society cannot be achieved only through punitive attitudes and vindictiveness; and that instead public harmony, brotherhood and mutual acceptability ought to be fostered. Thus, first-time offenders ought to be liberally accorded a chance to repent their past and look-forward to a bright future.” (emphasis added)

11. This Court also can not ignore the observation made by their Lordships' of Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Commissioner of Police and others v. Sandeep Kumar**, (2011) 4 SCC 644:-

“9. The modern approach should be to reform a person instead of branding him as a criminal all his life”.

12. In the case of Haribhau v. State of Maharashtra, (2018) 18 SCC 43, Hon'ble Apex Court made observation in the case of an appeal which was preferred against an order of reduction of sentence 'as already undergone'. Para 13 of the said judgment says as under:-

"13. In our considered opinion, firstly, taking into account that the appellant has already undergone one month's jail sentence out of three months awarded to him, secondly, the fact that the incident in question is quite old and seems to have occurred at the spur of the moment, thirdly, the appellant has no criminal antecedent in his past life and lastly, he is not required in any other criminal case except the one in question which the appellant fairly did not deny having committed and rightly did not challenge his conviction, it is considered to be just and proper to alter the jail sentence awarded to the appellant from three months to the extent of period of one month which was already undergone by him and instead enhance the total fine amount awarded under different sections from Rs. 800 to Rs. 15,000/-"

13. Now applying the principles noticed at different stages by the Courts', I find that recovery of 10 kg 500 grams of poppy husk in present case, was effected on 29.09.2002, i.e. more than 20 years back; (i) at the time of recovery, appellant was of the age of about 35 years; (ii) prior to that he was never found involved in any other case, especially of similar nature; (iii) even after involvement of appellant in the present case, there is no other case registered against him; (iv) had he been addicted himself or in the business of narcotic drugs, chances of his involvement after registration of the case in hand could be on higher side; (v) non-involvement in any other case is enough to assess that appellant has reformed himself and rehabilitated in the society; (vi) and that not sending the appellant again behind the bars, because of not repeating such offence again, may set an example for others also to get inspired of not involving themselves again in the field of narcotic drugs. Therefore, taking into consideration totality of

circumstances, this Court is of the view that ends of justice would be best met, if the substantive sentence of imprisonment of the appellant is reduced to that already undergone by him.

14. Resultantly, conviction of the appellant under Section 15 of the NDPS Act is maintained and his substantive sentence of imprisonment is reduced to that already undergone by him. However, remaining part of sentence, i.e. payment of fine of Rs. 10000/- shall remain intact and same be deposited within three months from today. Failing which, appellant would be liable for default clause as observed by the trial Court in its order of sentence dated 05.11.2004

15. By maintaining the judgment of conviction but, with the above modification(s) in the order of sentence dated 05.11.2004, passed by learned Judge Special Court, Rupnagar, present **appeal stands disposed of.**

16. Registry is directed to send back original lower court record alongwith a copy of this judgment to learned Trial Court, for taking further steps with regard to the recovery of fine, in accordance with law.

(SANJAY VASHISTH)
JUDGE

11.04.2023

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Whether speaking/reasoned: Yes/~~No~~
Whether Reportable: Yes/~~No~~