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W.P. No. 455 of 2024

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED : 19.01.2024

CORAM

THE HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE P.D. AUDIKESAVALU

W.P. No. 455 of 2024

K.Ravi

... Petitioner

-VS-

1. The Regional Transport Officer and Licensing Authority,
Office of the Regional Transport Officer,
Transport Department,
Ulundurpettai.

2. The Inspector of Police,
Edaikkal Police Station,
Kallakurichi District.

Respondents

...

Prayer:- Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, 1950, praying to issue a Writ of Mandamus, directing the Respondents to forthwith return Petitioner's original driving license bearing TN 58 20050005305 to him within a time limit that may be fixed by this Court.

For Petitioner : Mr. K.Hariharan

For Respondents : Mr. G.Nanmaran,
Special Government Pleader (for R1)

Mr. J.Subbiah,
Government Advocate (Criminal Side)
(for R2)



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ORDER

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Heard Mr. K.Hariharan, Learned Counsel for the Petitioner, Mr. G.Nanmaran, Learned Special Government Pleader appearing for the First Respondent and Mr. J.Subbiah, Learned Government Advocate (Criminal Side) appearing for the Second Respondent and perused the materials placed on record, apart from the pleadings of the parties.

2. The Petitioner is a driver in the State Express Transport Corporation (Tamilnadu) Limited and while on duty, the bus bearing Registration No. TN-01-AN-2407 driven by him had on 10.11.2023 at 4.00 a.m. met with an accident and his driving licence was seized on 14.11.2023 by the Second Respondent, who is investigating that accident, and forwarded to the First Respondent as the Licensing Authority. In that backdrop, relying on the decision of the Division Bench of this Court in ***P.Sethuram -vs- Licensing Authority, Regional Transport Officer, Dindigul*** (2010 WLR 100) holding that the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, (hereinafter referred to as 'the Act' for short) do not empower the Licensing Authority to suspend or revoke a driving licence for a first offence, the Petitioner has filed this Writ Petition for a direction to the Licensing Authority to return his driving licence.



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3. Learned Special Government Pleader appearing for the First Respondent submits that certain amendments have been made to the Act, which have come into force from 01.09.2019 onwards and clause (4) in Section 206 and clause (1-A) in Section 19 have been inserted to the Act, which have bearing to the contentions raised in the Writ Petition and read as follows:-

"206. Power of police officer to impound document:-

....

(4) A police officer or other person authorised in this behalf by the State Government shall, if he has reason to believe that the driver of a motor vehicle has committed, an offence under any of Sections 183, 184, 185, 189, 190, 194-C, 194-D or 194-E, seize the driving licence held by such driver and forward it to the licensing authority for disqualification or revocation proceedings under Section 19:

Provided that the person seizing the licence shall give to the person surrendering the licence a temporary acknowledgement therefor, but such acknowledgement shall not authorise the holder to drive until the licence has been returned



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to him."

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

....

(1-A) Where a licence has been forwarded to the licensing authority under sub-section (4) of Section 206, the licensing authority, if satisfied after giving the holder of the driving licence an opportunity of being heard, may either discharge the holder of a driving licence or, it may for detailed reasons recorded in writing, make an order disqualifying such person from holding or obtaining any licence to drive all or any class or description of vehicles specified in the licence:-

- (a) for a first offence, for a period of three months;*
- (b) for a second or subsequent offence, with revocation of the driving licence of such person:*

Provided that where a driving licence is revoked under this Section, the name of the holder of such driving licence may be placed in the public domain in such manner as may be prescribed by the Central Government."



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It is submitted that in view of the same, the lacunae highlighted by the Division Bench of this Court no longer exists, and the impugned action of seizing the driving licence of the driver of the vehicle involved in an accident by the Police Officer and forwarding it to the Licensing Authority, now has statutory backing and as such, that decision of the Division Bench of this Court would not have any applicability in cases where the accident has occurred after the amendments to the Act have come into force, as in the present one. It is also brought to notice that pursuant to the recommendations made by the Committee on Road Safety appointed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, show cause notice dated 07.12.2023 has been issued to the Petitioner for suspending his licence and after receipt of the explanation from the Petitioner, the Licensing Authority would pass appropriate orders in the matter under Section 19(1-A) of the Act.

4. In response to the aforesaid submissions made, Learned Counsel for the Petitioner highlights that clause (1-A) of Section 19 of the Act, empowers the Licensing Authority to disqualify a person from holding a driving licence for a first offence for a period of three months and that the Petitioner, whose licence has been seized on 14.11.2023 for a first offence, has been disabled since then to drive any vehicle. He further submits that the Petitioner has submitted his explanation dated 31.12.2023 to the aforesaid show cause notice dated



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07.12.2023. It is further pleaded that on account of seizure of the driving licence, the Petitioner is out of employment and any further delay in returning his driving licence causes hardship for his livelihood and as such, expeditious decision would have to be taken by the Licensing Authority in the matter.

5. Having regard to the aforesaid submissions made, this Court without expressing any view on the merits of the controversy involved in the matter, passes the following order:-

- (i) it shall be incumbent upon the First Respondent to immediately consider the explanation dated 31.12.2023 submitted by the Petitioner for the show cause notice dated 07.12.2023 issued to him;
- (ii) if any other details or supporting documents are necessary, the deficiencies in that regard shall be informed in writing by the First Respondent to the Petitioner requiring the same to be furnished within two clear working days from the date of its receipt by him;
- (iii) an enquiry shall be conducted thereafter affording full opportunity of personal hearing to the Petitioner to explain his position in that regard;
- (iv) a reasoned order shall be passed dealing with each of the contentions raised on merits and in accordance with law and the decision taken communicated under written acknowledgment;



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WEB (v) in the event that the First Respondent is not able to pass final orders within the period of three months from the actual date of seizure of the driving licence of the Petitioner by the Second Respondent, the driving licence of the Petitioner shall be then forthwith returned to him with endorsement to the effect that the Petitioner shall not be precluded from driving the vehicles for which he is otherwise authorized from that date onwards, subject to the result of the proceedings in which final orders would follow later; and

(vi) the First Respondent shall file report of such compliance by 31.03.2024 before the Registrar (Judicial) of the Court.

In the result, the Writ Petition is disposed on the aforesaid terms. No costs.

19.01.2024

Index: Yes/No

NCC: Yes/No

Note: Issue order copy by

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To

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1. The Regional Transport Officer and Licensing Authority,
Office of the Regional Transport Officer,
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2. The Inspector of Police,
Edaikkal Police Station,
Kallakurichi District.

Copy to

The Registrar (Judicial),
Madras High Court,
Chennai - 600 104.



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P.D. AUDIKESAVALU, J.

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