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Crl.R.C.No.1627 of 2024

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

RESERVED ON : 28.10.2024
PRONOUNCED ON : 20.12.2024

CORAM

THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE M.NIRMAL KUMAR

Crl.R.C.No.1627 of 2024

Balu P

... Petitioner / Third Party

Vs.

1.State Rep.by Inspector of Police
PEW-Thiruvallur Police Station,
Thiruvallur (Cr.No.222 of 2024)

... R1 / Complainant

2.Sugumar

... R2 / A1

3.Klaiselvan

... R3 / A2

PRAYER: Criminal Revision Petition filed under Section 438 r/w 442 of BNSS, to call for the records in Crl.M.P.No.9688 of 2024 on the file of the Principal Special Court under EC & NDPS, Chennai and quash dismissal order dated 18.09.2024 and to direct the 1st respondent Police to return the Goods Carrier (Lorry) to the petitioner bearing Registration No. (TN-12-BD-2985), Ashok Leyland PA1215/49H CC, Goods Carrier Diesel) Engine No.PREZ42757, Chassis Number MB1AUPCC1PERM5164, Colour: NP Colour, pending disposal of the above Crime No.222 of 2024 on the file of Inspector of Police PEW Thiruvallur Police Station.



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Crl.R.C.No.1627 of 2024

For Petitioner : Mr.V.M.Venkataramana
For R1 : Mr.Hasan Mohammed Jinnah
State Public Prosecutor
Assisted by
A.Damodaran
Addl.Public Prosecutor

ORDER

Challenging the order of dismissal dated 18.09.2024 in Crl.M.P.No.9688 of 2024 by the learned Principal Special Judge under EC & NDPS, Chennai, the petitioner, who is the owner of the vehicle viz., Goods Carrier (Lorry), bearing Reg.No.TN-12-BD-2985, is before this Court with the present Revision, for return of vehicle.

2. Mr.V.M.Venkataramana, the learned counsel appearing for the petitioner would submit that the petitioner purchased the vehicle viz., Goods Carrier (Lorry), bearing Reg.No.TN-12-BD-2985, during April, 2024 and the Registration was done in his name on 25.05.2024. The petitioner purchased the vehicle for Rs.19,20,140/- with a loan amount of Rs.18,32,667/-. The petitioner is paying the monthly EMI of Rs.44,180/- and he has to pay the monthly EMI from 15.06.2024 to 15.04.2029 for a period of five years. This being so, the petitioner



vehicle has been seized in Crime No.222 of 2024 and from then on the vehicle has been detained by the respondent and kept in open yard exposing to rain and shine and the value of vehicle is getting diminished. Further, the vehicle to become unusable, turning to get rusted and scrap. In support of his ownership, the petitioner produced Registration Certificate, MV Tax Receipt, Vehicle Insurance, vehicle permit and HDB Financial Service letter. Along with the vehicle, 131 Rolls of Garments Fabrics also seized. He further submitted that A1 and A2 in Crime No.222 of 2024 were arrested and remanded on 12.08.2022, for illicit transport of 55.600 Kgs of Ganja using the petitioner's vehicle viz., Goods Carrier (Lorry), bearing Reg.No.TN-12-BD-2985. From the lorry, 55.600 Kgs of Ganja, a commercial quantity and 131 Rolls of Garments Fabrics seized. The seized articles produced before the lower Court in A.No.1116/2024 and B.No.621/2024. The petitioner claiming that he is Managing Partner of M/s.Simadhiri Transport Service, a Transport Company entered into an agreement for transportation of goods on regular basis with Teejay India Pvt.Ltd., a Fabric Manufacturing Company. The petitioner's vehicle was booked through online APP FR8 by M/s.New Olog Logistics Pvt.Ltd., for transportation of cotton bundle consignment from Visakhapatnam to Tuticorin and the consignment



transported through the petitioner's lorry. A2, the driver of the lorry, and A1 was travelling in the lorry. Both broke opened the seal of the container and transported 58 Kgs of Ganja along with garment bales. The consignment was to be delivered to Tuticorin Harbour and from there to Colombo.

3. Mr.Hasan Mohammed Jinnah, the learned State Public Prosecutor would submit that as regards the return of 131 Rolls of Garments Fabrics, the lower Court granted return of articles in Crl.M.P.No.9338 of 2024 on 09.09.2024. As regards, the the return of vehicle, viz., Goods Carrier (Lorry), bearing Reg.No.TN-12-BD-2985, the return of Property petition in Crl.M.P.No.9688 of 2024 was dismissed by order dated 18.09.2024, since commercial quantity was seized from the vehicle. Hence, he strongly objected for allowing the Revision.

4. The learned State Public Prosecutor vehemently opposed the petition submitting that return of property in the NDPS Act Cases cannot be entertained invoking Sections 457 and 451 of Cr.P.C., and it is liable for confiscation under Section 52-A, 60, 61 and 63 of NDPS Act., unless the owner of the conveyance proves that the conveyance



was used without his knowledge and connivance, he has taken all reasonable precaution against such use. In support of his contention, the learned State Public Prosecutor relied on the Judgment of the Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Suresh Nanda Vs. Central Bureau of Investigation** reported in **(2008) 3 SCC 674** to stress the point that, where there is a special Act dealing with subject, resort should be to that Act instead of general Act providing for the matter connected with the specific Act. He stressed his argument mainly on **Union of India Vs. Mohanlal and Another** reported in **(2016) 3 SCC 379**, wherein the Apex Court has given directions for storage, seizure and sampling, handling and disposal of seized narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Considering the piquant situation in which accumulation of huge quantities of seized drugs and narcotics increased the chances of their pilferage for re-circulation in the market and also finding that despite Central Government Standing Order No.1/1989 and two subsequent Standing Orders, dated 10.05.2007 and 16.01.2015 giving directions, directing that no sooner seizure of any narcotic and psychotropic and controlled substances and conveyances is effected, the same shall be forwarded to the officer in-charge of the nearest police station or to the officer empowered under Section 53 of the Act and Section 52-A(2) of the



Act. The sampling shall be done under the supervision of the Magistrate and the Central and State Government and its agencies within six months from the date of the order take appropriate steps to set up storage facilities for the exclusive storage of seized narcotic and psychotropic substances and conveyances, duly equipped with vaults and double-locking system to prevent theft, pilferage or replacement of the seized drugs. Further, the Apex Court given direction to constitute Drug Disposal Committee and disposal of seized drugs lying in the Police Malkhanas and other places used for storage of drugs and psychotropic substances.

5. The learned State Public Prosecutor would further submit that this Court in ***Crl.R.C(MD)No.41 of 2019*** in the case of ***Nahoorkani Vs. The State of Tamil Nadu on 16.06.2023*** held that when the conveyance is seized under NDPS Act, the return of property does not arise as contemplated under Sections 451 and 457 of Cr.P.C., and it is liable to be confiscated under Section 63 of the NDPS Act in the light of special procedure under Section 52-A of the Act. Any person claiming the ownership or right of the conveyance may approach the concerned Drug Disposal Committee directly and make claim and the Drug Disposal Committee before taking a decision



on disposal of the vehicle, shall grant opportunity of hearing to the parties and pass appropriate orders on the representation made by the party in accordance with law, as expeditiously as possible, within a period of two months. Further, if any persons approach the trial Court for release of vehicle, the property already produced before the trial Court and assigned R.P.Number then such court shall conduct enquiry and pass suitable orders, as contemplated under Section 63 of the NDPS Act or if the vehicle not produced before the Court then competent Court shall pass appropriate order by directing the petitioner to approach concerned Drug Disposal Committee for getting suitable relief. Further, in the event of trial Court / Special Court for NDPS release the vehicle under Section 451 Cr.P.C., shall initiate the confiscation proceedings and dispose the vehicle as contemplated under Section 63 of the NDPS Act.

6. Further, he relied on the order of this this Court in ***Crl.R.C.(MD)No.116 of 2024, dated 08.02.2024*** wherein this Court, following the order passed in ***Nahoorkani's*** case (*cited supra*) held that whenever a return of property is filed, the petitioner has to satisfy Sections 60, 61 and 62 of NDPS Act. In yet another case, in ***Crl.R.C(MD)No.1395 of 2023, Gomathi Vs. State***, dated



27.02.2024, this Court passed orders on the similar line of **Nahoorkani's** case. Further, he referred **Crl.R.C.No.675 of 2023** in the case of **Salimrajan @ Salimraj Vs. State dated 12.07.2023** wherein this Court again followed the **Nahoorkani's** case. In sum and substance, he argued that any property say conveyance seized in NDPS Act cases cannot be returned as a matter of routine and it is only after satisfying Sections 60, 61, 62, and 63 of the said Act.

7. The learned counsel appearing for the petitioner opposed the contention of the learned State Public Prosecutor and submitted that **Mohanlal's case**, refers to Section 52-A primarily with regard to not following the Standing Order No.1/1989 and the subsequent Standing Orders, dated 10.05.2007 and 16.01.2015, which prescribed procedures to be followed while conducting seizure of contraband, sampling, safe custody and disposal finding that there is no uniform procedures followed in seizure, sampling and storing the narcotic in safe vaults and handling and disposal of seized narcotics, lying in the malkhanas or any other storage place without proper storage facility, thereby, the danger of recirculation of seized contraband into system is very much likely, hence issued directions to the Investigation Agency, Magistrate and Governments to follow guidelines. Further,



submitted that this Court, following the Apex Court Judgment in ***Sainaba Vs. State of Kerala and Anr*** in ***Crl.A.No.2005/2022***, reported in ***2022 (7) KHC 2731***, wherein the Apex Court released the vehicle involved in the NDPS Act well after ***Mohanlals' case***. Hence, it cannot be said that ***Mohanlal's case*** places restrictions on release of vehicle. The ***Sainaba's case***, being the Judgment of the Apex Court this Court finding, it is binding under Article 144 of the Constitution of India entertained and allowed the return of property petition filed under Sections 451 and 457. The citations referred by the State Public Prosecutor is no more *res integra* on the point of return of property. He further added that this Court in Crl.R.C.(MD)No.41 of 2019, Crl.R.C.(MD)No.116 of 2024 and Crl.R.C.(MD)No.1395 of 2023 and in Crl.R.C.(MD)No.675 of 2022, the ***Sainaba's case*** was not considered. In view of the Apex Court Judgment in ***Sainaba's case***, the confiscation proceedings cannot be an embargo to consider the return of property petition, but of course, the return of property petition to be considered on its own merits and hence, there is no impediment to entertain the above petition.

8. I have heard the learned counsels appearing on either side and perused the materials available on record.



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9. On perusal of the records it is seen that in ***Mohanlal's case***, the Apex Court finding is that, despite issuance of the Standing Order No.1/1989 and the subsequent Standing Orders, dated 10.05.2007 and 16.01.2015, no uniform practice and procedures followed by State or Central Agencies in the matter of drawing of samples at the time of seizure, storage of drugs in safes and vaults, not placed in double-locking system and piquant situation arose by which accumulation of huge quantities of the seized drugs and narcotics increased and the chances of their pilferage for re-circulation in the market, hence put in place certain procedures and guidelines to the Investigation Agency, Magistrate, Central and State Governments, and ordered formation of Drug Disposal Committee to monitor the same. No direction with regard to the conveyance considered and issued. Further, the Notification No.G.S.R.899(E), dated 23.12.2022 issued in terms of Section 52-A of the NDPS Act. The question whether there is any legal embargo in view of confiscation proceedings under Sections 60 to 63 of the NDPS Act and whether petition seeking return of property under Sections 451 and 457 can be entertained and decided has been dealt in detail by the Karnataka High Court Division Bench in ***Rathnamma v. State rep., by PSI, Channagiri Police***



Station, Davabagere District in **CRL.P.No.3571/2021**, which was in conflict to the Division Bench Judgement of the Kerala High Court in **Shajahan Vs. Inspector of Excise and Others** reported in **2019 SCC Online Ker 3685**, hence the matter was referred to a Larger Bench by the Kerala High Court and the Kerala High Court in the case of **Pradeep B. Vs. The District Drug Disposal Committee represented by its Chairman, Kasargod and Others** in **WA No.1304 of 2022, dated 19.02.2024** dealt in detail, referring to Section 52-A, guidelines given in the **Mohanlal's case** and held that jurisdictional Special Court under the NDPS Act has power to consider the grant of interim custody of the vehicle under the Act by invoking powers under Section 457 of Cr.P.C., and answered the reference accordingly. It had also referred to the orders passed by Allahabad High Court in **Shams Tavrej v. Union of India reported in 2023 SCC OnLine AII 1154** and **Rajdhari Yadav v. State of U.P. Reported in 2022 SCC OnLine AII 583** and **Union of India v. Tejinder Singh reported in 2023 SCC OnLine Gau 729** and following **Sainaba Vs. State of Kerala (2022 (7) KHC 273)** held interim custody of a vehicle involved under the NDPS Act could be ordered. In **Sainaba's case**, the procedures contemplated and applicable in NDPS Act in consonance with Cr.P.C., are dealt in detail.



The Apex Court considering both NDPS Act and Cr.P.C., held as follows:-

“5. It has been opined by the High Court that the Court is not empowered to exercise the jurisdiction under Section 451 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to release a vehicle involved under NDPS Act in interim custody.

6.The appellant has urged inter alia that as per Section 36-C read with Section 51 of the NDPS Act, Criminal Procedure Code would be application for proceedings by a Special Court under NDPS Act and Section 451 has an inbuilt provision to impose any specific condition on the appellant while releasing the vehicle. The appellant is undoubtedly the registered owner of the vehicle but had not participated in the offence as alleged by the prosecution nor had knowledge of the alleged transaction.

7. Learned counsel seeks to rely on the judgment of this Court in *Sunderbhai Ambalal Desai Vs. State of Gujarat* – 2003 (2) KLT 1089 (SC) = (2002) 10 SCC 283 opining that it is no use to keep such seized vehicles at police station for a long period and it is open to the Magistrate to pass appropriate orders immediately by taking a bond and a guarantee as well as security for return of the said vehicle, if required any any point of time.

8. On hearing learned counsel for parties and



in the conspectus of the facts and circumstances of the case, and the legal provisions referred aforesaid, we are of the view that this is a appropriate case for release of the vehicle on terms and conditions to be determined by the Special Court.”

10. Hence, following the Supreme Court Judgment, in **Sainaba's case**, and the Full Bench of Kerala High Court in **Pradeep's case**, this Court finds the objection of the learned State Public Prosecutor that there is total embargo in entertaining the petition for return of property under the relevant provision of Cr.P.C., is no more *res intergra*. In view of the same, this Court is inclined to entertain and consider the grant of interim custody of vehicles seized under the NDPS by invoking the power under Sections 451 and 457 of Cr.P.C consequently under Section 497 and 503 BNSS.

11. It is seen that the petitioner is the owner of the lorry and he is running transport business. The container containing 131 Rolls of Garments Fabrics was transported from from Visakhapatnam to Tuticorin Port and from there to Colombo. The act of the accused 1 and 2 in broke opened the container and concealing the Ganja, the petitioner has no knowledge and the petitioner cannot be penalized



for the illegal act of the driver and another person. The petitioner purchased the vehicle by availing loan and he is compelled to pay the monthly EMI. The vehicle is the source of income to pay EMI and also to sustain the petitioner. Further, if the vehicle is kept in open yard exposed to sunlight and rain, the condition of the said vehicle will be deteriorating day-by-day and the value of the vehicle will get diminished. In view of the same, this Court is inclined to allow the Revision.

12. The lower Court following the guidelines given in ***Sunderbhai Ambalal Desai case***, take photographs, record the features of the vehicle, prepare a proceeding to be used as proof in the trial, before releasing the vehicle to the petitioner.

13. In view of the foregoing reasons, the order of dismissal dated 18.09.2024 in Crl.M.P.No.9866 of 2024, passed by the learned Principal Special Judge under EC & NDPS, Chennai, is set aside and this Revision is allowed with a direction to the learned Principal Sessions Judge, to release the petitioner's vehicle viz., Goods Carrier (Lorry), bearing Reg.No.TN-12-BD-2985, in favour of the petitioner on the petitioner submitting an undertaking on the following terms and conditions:-



CrI.R.C.No.1627 of 2024

i. The petitioner shall furnish an indemnity bond of Rs.50,000/- (Rupees Fifty Thousand Only) with two solvent sureties, undertaking to produce the vehicle as and when directed by the court.

ii. The petitioner shall not sale, mortgage or transfer the ownership of the vehicle during the pendency of the case.

iii. The petitioner shall not change or tamper with the identification of the vehicle in any manner during pendency of the case.

iv. Any other condition, if any, to be imposed by the trial court.

20.12.2024

Index : Yes/No
Speaking Order/Non Speaking Order
Neutral Citation: Yes/No

vv2/mpk

To

- 1.The Principal Special Judge under EC & NDPS,
Chennai,
2. The Inspector of Police,
PEW-Thiruvallur Police Station,
Thiruvallur
3. The Public Prosecutor,
High Court, Chennai.

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Crl.R.C.No.1627 of 2024

M.NIRMAL KUMAR, J.

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Pre-Delivery Order made in

Crl.R.C.No.1627 of 2024

20.12.2024