

CRR(F)-207-2023
Date of decision: 09.04.2024

Versus

Jasjit Singh ...Respondent

Present: Mr. Sandeep Bansal, Advocate
for the petitioners.

1. The present petition has been preferred for enhancement against the impugned judgment dated 30.09.2022 passed by the learned Family Court, Hoshiarpur, under Section 125 of the Cr.P.C. vide which the interim maintenance of Rs.3,000/- per month was awarded to petitioner No.1 only, i.e. wife of the respondent.

2. Mr. Mitul Singh Rana, Advocate puts in appearance on behalf of the respondent and files his *memorandum of appearance* in the Court today which is taken on record. Registry is directed to tag the same at an appropriate place in the file.

3. The marriage between petitioner No.1 and the respondent was solemnized on 15.01.2000 in accordance with Hindu rites and ceremonies. Out of this wedlock, two male children were born. However, matrimonial dispute ensued between the couple and petitioner No.1 filed a petition under Section 125 Cr.P.C. seeking maintenance. The respondent filed a reply and contested

the claim made by petitioner No.1. The learned Family Court vide order dated 30.09.2022 granted interim maintenance allowance of Rs.3,000/- per month in favour of petitioner No.1. Aggrieved by the same, the petitioners have approached this Court by filing the present petition.

4. Learned counsel for the petitioners *inter alia* contends that petitioner No.1 is only 12th pass and she cannot earn her livelihood and is also unable to find a suitable job. She is totally dependent upon the maintenance and she is also raising her minor son who is also dependent upon the maintenance awarded by the learned Additional Principal Judge, Family Court, Hoshiarpur. It is further contended that it is an admitted case that the respondent is earning Rs.75,147/-, out of which, he is only paying Rs.4,000/- per month to his mother by way of maintenance under the provision of Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 and the learned Court below has totally ignored the actual salary while determined the quantum of maintenance and only Rs.3,000/- per month has been awarded to petitioner No.1. The petitioner has filed a complaint under the provisions of Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, where, she was awarded Rs.5,000/- per month as maintenance, however, she could not pursue the litigation and her complaint was dismissed in default vide order dated 07.05.2022.

5. Per contra, learned counsel for the respondent submits that respondent is also paying for the study of his major son who is studying in Canada and the expenses of his study are huge.

6. Having heard the learned counsel for the parties and after

perusing the record with their able assistance, the present petition is being decided in *limine* in view of directions issued by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in '**Rajnesh v. Neha and another**' (2021) 2 SCC 324, and also to save litigation cost of the respondent and judicial time of the Court.

7. The object and purpose behind granting maintenance is to ensure that the dependent spouse is not reduced to destitution or vagrancy on account of failure of marriage. At the same time, a just and careful balance must be struck to ensure that this provision does not degenerate into a weapon to punish the other spouse. The Courts are required to conduct the maintenance proceedings while being alive to the legislative intent behind the provision under Section 125 Cr.P.C in its true spirit, which is to provide speedy assistance and social justice to women, children and infirm parents. The provisions of Section 125 Cr.P.C. were enacted as a measure to further social justice and protect dependent women, children and parents, which also fall within the constitutional sweep of Article 15(3) reinforced by Article 39 of the Constitution of India.

8. A three-Judge Bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Vimala (K.) v. Veeraswamy (K.) (1991) 2 SCC 375***, speaking through Justice Fatima Beevi, opined that as follows:

"3. Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure is meant to achieve a social purpose. The object is to prevent vagrancy and destitution. It provides a speedy remedy for the supply of food, clothing, and shelter to the deserted wife."

A two-Judge Bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Kirtikant D. Vadodaria v. State of Gujarat (1996) 4 SCC 479***, speaking through Justice Faizan Uddin, opined as follows:

“15. ... While dealing with the ambit and scope of the provision contained in Section 125 of the Code, it has to be borne in mind that the dominant and primary object is to give social justice to the woman, child and infirm parents, etc. and to prevent destitution and vagrancy by compelling those who can support those who are unable to support themselves but have a moral claim for support. The provisions in Section 125 provide a speedy remedy to those women, children and destitute parents who are in distress. The provisions in Section 125 are intended to achieve this special purpose. The dominant purpose behind the benevolent provisions contained in Section 125 clearly is that the wife, child and parents should not be left in a helpless state of distress, destitution and starvation.”

9. Another objective the legislature has sought to achieve by this provision is to provide maintenance *pendente lite* to the applicant spouse during proceedings emerging out of matrimonial disputes so that he/she can maintain himself/herself, have sufficient funds to pursue the litigation, and not suffer at the instance of the affluent spouse.

10. There is a general tendency on the part of the wife to amplify her needs and the husband to conceal his actual income, making it difficult to determine the earning capacity of the rival claimants with exactitude. The rival claimants must scrupulously bring on record their actual respective earning capacities in order for the Court to arrive at quantum of maintenance which is just and fair in terms of principle of equistatus. The quantum of maintenance must be justifiable and realistic to provide succour to the dependent spouse and also to avoid occurrence of the two extremes of the maintenance being either paltry or extravagant, ensuring that neither of the two is reduced to a life of penury. The adequacy of the maintenance allowance has to be determined by the yardstick of the dependent spouse being able to lead a life of reasonable comfort.

11. While dealing with the issue of maintenance *in extenso*, a two

Judge bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in '**Rajnish v. Neha and another**' (2021) 2 SCC 324, laid down the criteria for determining quantum of maintenance and issued the following directions:

"III Criteria for determining quantum of maintenance

(i) The objective of granting interim/permanent alimony is to ensure that the dependant spouse is not reduced to destitution or vagrancy on account of the failure of the marriage, and not as a punishment to the other spouse. There is no straitjacket formula for fixing the quantum of maintenance to be awarded.

82. *The factors which would weigh with the Court inter alia are the status of the parties; reasonable needs of the wife and dependent children; whether the applicant is educated and professionally qualified; whether the applicant has any independent source of income; whether the income is sufficient to enable her to maintain the same standard of living as she was accustomed to in her matrimonial home; whether the applicant was employed prior to her marriage; whether she was working during the subsistence of the marriage; whether the wife was required to sacrifice her employment opportunities for nurturing the family, child rearing, and looking after adult members of the family; reasonable costs of litigation for a non-working wife. Refer to Jasbir Kaur Sehgal v. District Judge, Dehradun and others (1997) 7 SCC 7. Refer to Vinny Paramvir Parmar v. Paramvir Parmar (2011) 13 SCC 112.*

83. *In Manish Jain v. Akanksha Jain (2017) 15 SCC 801 this Court held that the financial position of the parents of the applicant-wife, would not be material while determining the quantum of maintenance. An order of interim maintenance is conditional on the circumstance that the wife or husband who makes a claim has no independent income, sufficient for her or his support. It is no answer to a claim of maintenance that the wife is educated and could support herself. The court must take into consideration the status of the parties and the capacity of the spouse to pay for her or his support. Maintenance is dependent upon factual situations; the Court should mould the claim for maintenance based on various factors brought before it.*

84. *On the other hand, the financial capacity of the husband, his actual income, reasonable expenses for his own maintenance, and dependant family members whom he is obliged to maintain under the law, liabilities if any, would be required to be taken into consideration, to arrive at the appropriate quantum of maintenance to be paid. The Court must have due regard to the standard of living of the husband, as well as the spiralling inflation rates and high costs of living. The plea of the husband that he does not possess any source of income ipso facto does not absolve him of his moral duty to maintain his wife if he is able bodied and has educational qualifications. Reema Salkan v. Sumer Singh Salkan (2019) 12 SCC 303.*

(ii) A careful and just balance must be drawn between all relevant factors. The test for determination of maintenance in matrimonial disputes depends on the financial status of the respondent, and the standard of living that the applicant was accustomed to in her matrimonial home. *Chaturbhuj v. Sita Bai* (2008) 2 SCC 316.

85. The maintenance amount awarded must be reasonable and realistic, and avoid either of the two extremes i.e. maintenance awarded to the wife should neither be so extravagant which becomes oppressive and unbearable for the respondent, nor should it be so meagre that it drives the wife to penury. The sufficiency of the quantum has to be adjudged so that the wife is able to maintain herself with reasonable comfort.

(iii) Section 23 of HAMA provides statutory guidance with respect to the criteria for determining the quantum of maintenance. Sub-section (2) of Section 23 of HAMA provides the following factors which may be taken into consideration : (i) position and status of the parties, (ii) reasonable wants of the claimant, (iii) if the petitioner/claimant is living separately, the justification for the same, (iv) value of the claimant's property and any income derived from such property, (v) income from claimant's own earning or from any other source.

(iv) Section 20(2) of the D.V. Act provides that the monetary relief granted to the aggrieved woman and/or the children must be adequate, fair, reasonable, and consistent with the standard of living to which the aggrieved woman was accustomed to in her matrimonial home.

(v) The Delhi High Court in *Bharat Hedge v. Smt. Saroj Hegde* 40 (2007) DLT 16 laid down the following factors to be considered for determining maintenance :

"1. Status of the parties.

2. Reasonable wants of the claimant.

3. The independent income and property of the claimant.

4. The number of persons, the non-applicant has to maintain.

5. The amount should aid the applicant to live in a similar lifestyle as he/she enjoyed in the matrimonial home.

6. Non-applicant's liabilities, if any.

7. Provisions for food, clothing, shelter, education, medical attendance and treatment etc. of the applicant. 8. Payment capacity of the non-applicant.

9. Some guess work is not ruled out while estimating the income of the non-applicant when all the sources or correct sources are not disclosed.

10. The non-applicant to defray the cost of litigation.

11. The amount awarded under section 125 Cr.PC is adjustable against the amount awarded u/24 of the Act. 17."

(vi) Apart from the aforesaid factors enumerated hereinabove, certain additional factors would also be relevant for determining the quantum of maintenance payable."

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VI Final Directions

130. In view of the foregoing discussion as contained in Part B -1 to V of this judgment, we deem it appropriate to pass the following directions in exercise of our powers under Article 142 of the Constitution of India:

(a) Issue of overlapping jurisdiction

131. To overcome the issue of overlapping jurisdiction, and avoid conflicting orders being passed in different proceedings, it has become necessary to issue directions in this regard, so that there is uniformity in the practice followed by the Family Courts/District Courts/Magistrate Courts throughout the country. We direct that:

- (i) where successive claims for maintenance are made by a party under different statutes, the Court would consider an adjustment or setoff, of the amount awarded in the previous proceeding/s, while determining whether any further amount is to be awarded in the subsequent proceeding;
- (ii) it is made mandatory for the applicant to disclose the previous proceeding and the orders passed therein, in the subsequent proceeding;
- (iii) if the order passed in the previous proceeding/s requires any modification or variation, it would be required to be done in the same proceeding

(b) Payment of Interim Maintenance

132. The Affidavit of Disclosure of Assets and Liabilities annexed as Enclosures I, II and III of this judgment, as may be applicable, shall be filed by both parties in all maintenance proceedings, including pending proceedings before the concerned Family Court / District Court / Magistrates Court, as the case may be, throughout the country.

(c) Criteria for determining the quantum of maintenance

133. For determining the quantum of maintenance payable to an applicant, the Court shall take into account the criteria enumerated in Part B III of the judgment.

134. The aforesaid factors are however not exhaustive, and the concerned Court may exercise its discretion to consider any other factor/s which may be necessary or of relevance in the facts and circumstances of a case.

(d) Date from which maintenance is to be awarded

135. We make it clear that maintenance in all cases will be awarded from the date of filing the application for maintenance, as held in Part B-IV above.

(e) Enforcement/Execution of orders of maintenance

136. For enforcement/execution of orders of maintenance, it is directed that an order or decree of maintenance may be enforced under Section 28A of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1956; Section 20(6) of the D.V. Act; and Section 128 of Cr.P.C may be applicable. The order of maintenance may be enforced as a money decree of a civil court as per the provisions of the CPC more particularly Sections 51, 55, 58, 60 r.w. Order XXI."

12. It is evident that the learned Court below has passed the impugned order in a perfunctory manner, without appreciating the facts of the case. The interim maintenance awarded to the petitioners is on the lower side and the learned Court below has failed to ensure a fair and accurate assessment of the petitioners' financial circumstances. A careful and just balance needs to be drawn, keeping in view the spiralling inflation rates and the high cost of living corresponding to the reasonable needs of the respondent.

13. Accordingly, the present petition is allowed, and the impugned order is modified to the extent that amount of Rs.3,000/- per month awarded to petitioner No.1, as interim maintenance, is enhanced to Rs.6,000/- per month and respondent is also directed to pay Rs.6,000/- per month to petitioner No.2 as interim maintenance.

14. Pending miscellaneous applications, if any, are disposed of accordingly.

(HARPREET SINGH BRAR)
JUDGE

09.04.2024
Neha

Whether speaking/reasoned : Yes/No
Whether reportable : Yes/No