

2024-PHHC-143820



IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA
AT CHANDIGARH

208

CRM-M-61516-2023

Date of Decision : 05.11.2024

DES RAJ ALIAS RAJ

.....Petitioner

VERSUS

STATE OF PUNJAB

.....Respondent

211

CRM-M-50343-2024

HARBHAJAN SINGH @ BHAJANA

.....Petitioner

VERSUS

STATE OF PUNJAB

.....Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE KULDEEP TIWARI

Present : Mr. Jashandeep Singh Sandhu, Advocate for
Mr. J.P.S.Brar, Advocate,
for the petitioner in CRM-M-61516-2023

Ms. Arshpreet Kaur, Advocate, Advocate for
Mr. Vikramjeet Singh, Advocate,
for the petitioner in CRM-M-50343-2024.

Mr. Sahil R. Bakshi, AAG, Punjab.

KULDEEP TIWARI, J.(Oral)

1. Since both the petitions are arising out of a common FIR, therefore, being amenable for common decision, same are taken up together.

2. Through the instant first petitions, the petitioners craves for indulgence of this Court for them being enlarged on regular bail, in case

FIR No.217, dated 15.09.2022, under Sections 22(c)/27 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act, 1985, registered at Police Station Special Task Force, District STF Wing, Bathinda (Annexure P-1).

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THE PETITIONER

2. The allegations as alleged by the prosecution are that on 15.09.2022, between 6:45 p.m. to 8:55 p.m., in the area of main Mour-Talwandi Road, near bridge of canal mour, both the present petitioners were apprehended by the police party of STF Bathinda Range, Bathinda and from their possession 1080 tablets of Alprasafe 0.5, strips bearing batch No. PCCAA1014 and 420 tablets of Alprasafe 0.5, strips bearing back no.PCCAA948, were recovered. Both the petitioners were arrested on dated 15.09.2022. Thereupon, the investigation was carried out. After completion of investigation a final report was filed by the investigating agency on dated 04.01.2023. Thereupon, the learned trial court concerned framed the charges on dated 20.01.2023.

SUBMISSIONS OF LEARNED COUNSEL FOR THE PETITIONERS

3. Learned counsel for the petitioners, in his asking for the hereinabove extracted relief, submits that both the petitioners have suffered incarceration of more than 2 years, as on today, and till date the prosecution is unable to conclude the trial.

4. They further submit that the long incarceration of the petitioners would dilute the rigors of Section 37 of the NDPS Act.

5. They further placed reliance upon a judgment of the Supreme Court in in "**Rabi Prakash Versus The State of Odisha**", **Special Leave to Appeal (Criminal) No.4169 of 2023**.

SUBMISSIONS OF THE LEARNED STATE COUNSEL

6. *Per contra*, the learned State counsel vociferously opposed the grant of regular bail to the present petitioners on the ground that the recovery in the instant matter is of 192.50 grams of '*Alprazolam*', which falls within the ambit of commercial quantity as per the schedule attached to the NDPS Act, wherein more than 100 grams is stated to be of commercial quantity.

7. He, on instructions imparted to him by the police official concerned, submits that out of the total 15 prosecution witnesses, 6 witnesses have been examined and 7 have been given up and now only 2 witnesses remaining to be examined.

8. He has also filed custody certificates *qua* the petitioners, today in court, which is taken on record. It reveals that the petitioners have suffered incarceration of 2 years 1 month 18 days, as on today, and they are not involved in any other criminal case.

ANALYSIS

9. Before embarking upon the process of evaluating the arguments addressed by the learned counsels for the parties and penning down any opinion upon the instant petition, it is deemed imperative to capture an overview of some significant legal propositions.

10. “*Bail is the Rule and Jail is an Exception*”. This basic principle of criminal jurisprudence was laid down by the Hon’ble Supreme Court, way back in 1978, in its landmark judgment titled “***State of Rajasthan V. Balchand alias Baliay***”, 1977 AIR 2447, 1978 SCR (1) 535. This principle finds its roots in one of the most distinguished fundamental rights, as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Though the underlying objective behind detention of a person is to ensure easy availability of an accused for trial, without any inconvenience, however, in case the presence of an accused can be secured otherwise, then detention is not compulsory.

11. The right to a speedy trial is one of the rights of a detained person. However, while deciding application for regular bail, the Courts shall also take into consideration the fundamental precept of criminal jurisprudence, which is “the presumption of innocence”, besides the gravity of offence(s) involved.

12. In “***Gurbaksh Singh Sibbia v. State of Punjab***”, (1980) 2 SCC 565 at 586-588, the purpose of granting bail is set out by the Hon’ble Supreme Court with great felicity as follows:-

“27. It is not necessary to refer to decisions which deal with the right to ordinary bail because that right does not furnish an exact parallel to the right to anticipatory bail. It is, however, interesting that as long back as in 1924 it was held by the High Court of Calcutta in Nagendra v. King Emperor, AIR 1924 Calcutta 476 (479, 480) that the object of bail is to secure the attendance of the accused at the trial, that the proper test to be applied in the solution of the question whether bail should be granted or refused is whether it is probable that the party will appear to take his trial and that it is indisputable that bail is not to be withheld as a punishment. In two other cases which, significantly, are the 'Meerut Conspiracy cases observations are to be found regarding the right to bail which deserve a special

mention. In K.N. Joglekar v. Emperor, AIR 1931 Allahabad 504 (SB) it was observed, while dealing with Section 498 which corresponds to the present Section 439 of the Code, that it conferred upon the Sessions Judge or the High Court wide powers to grant bail which were not handicapped by the restrictions in the preceding Section 497 which corresponds to the present Section 437. It was observed by the Court that there was no hard and fast rule and no inflexible principle governing the exercise of the discretion conferred by Section 498 and that the only principle which was established was that the discretion should be exercised judiciously. In Emperor v. H.L. Hutchinson, AIR 1931 Allahabad 356 at p. 358 it was said that it was very unwise to make an attempt to lay down any particular rules which bind the High Court, having regard to the fact that the legislature itself left the discretion of the Court unfettered. According to the High Court, the variety of cases that may arise from time to time cannot be safely classified and it is dangerous to make an attempt to classify the cases and to say that in particular classes a bail may be granted but not in other classes. It was observed that the principle to be deduced from the various sections in the Criminal Procedure Code was that grant of bail is the rule and refusal is the exception. An accused person who enjoys freedom is in a much better position to look after his case and to properly defend himself than if he were in custody. As a presumably innocent person he is therefore entitled to freedom and every opportunity to look after his own case. A presumably innocent person must have his freedom to enable him to establish his innocence.

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29. In Gurcharan Singh v. State (Delhi Admn.) (1978) 1 SCC 118 it was observed by Goswami, J., who spoke for the Court, that "there cannot be an inexorable formula in the matter of granting bail. The facts and circumstances of each case will govern the exercise of judicial discretion in granting or cancelling bail".

30. In American Jurisprudence (2d, Vol. 8, page 806, para 39) it is stated :

"Where the granting of bail lies within the discretion of the court, the granting or denial is regulated, to a large extent, by the facts and circumstances of each particular case. Since the object of the detention or imprisonment of the accused is to secure his appearance and submission to the jurisdiction and the judgment of the court, the primary inquiry is whether a recognizance or bond would effect that end."

It is thus clear that the question whether to grant bail or not depends for its answer upon a variety of circumstances, the cumulative effect of which must enter into the judicial verdict. Any one single circumstance cannot be treated as of universal validity or as necessarily justifying the grant or refusal of bail."

13. Also, in ***“Gudikanti Narasimhulu and others Versus Public Prosecutor, High Court of Andhra Pradesh”, 1978 AIR (Supreme Court) 429***, the Hon’ble Supreme Court, speaking through Krishna Iyer, J., has enunciated the principles of bail thus :

“9. Thus the legal principle and practice validate the court considering the likelihood of the applicant interfering with witnesses for the prosecution or otherwise polluting the process of justice. It is not only traditional but rational, in this context, to enquire into the antecedents of a man who is applying for bail to find whether he has a bad record-particularly a record which suggests that he is likely to commit serious offences while on bail. In regard to habitual, it is part of criminological history that a thoughtless bail order has enabled the bailee to exploit the opportunity to inflict further crimes on the member of society. Bail discretion, on the basis of evidence about the criminal record of a defendant, is therefore not an exercise in irrelevance.

10. The significance and sweep of Article 21 make the deprivation of liberty a matter of grave concern and permissible only when the law authorising it is reasonable, even-handed and geared to the goals of community good and State necessity spelt out in Article 19. Indeed, the considerations I have set out as criteria are germane to the constitutional proposition I have deduced. Reasonableness postulates intelligent care and predicates that deprivation of freedom by refusal of bail is not for punitive purpose but for the bi-focal interests of justice - to the individual involved and society affected.

11. We must weight the contrary factors to answer the test the reasonableness, subject to the need for securing the presence of the bail applicant. It makes sense to assume that a man on bail has a better chance to prepare of present his case than one remanded in custody. And if public justice is to be promoted. mechanical detention should be demoted. In the United States, which has a constitutional perspective close to ours, the function of bail is limited, 'community roots' of the applicant are stressed and, after the Vera Foundation's Manhattan Bail Project, monetary suretyship is losing ground. The considerable public expense in keeping in custody where no danger of disappearance or disturbance can arise, is not a negligible consideration. Equally important is the deplorable condition, verging on the inhuman, of our sub-jails, that the unrewarding cruelty and expensive custody of avoidable incarceration makes refusal of bail unreasonable and a policy favouring release justly sensible.

12. A few other weighty factors deserve reference. All deprivation of liberty is validated by social defence and individual correction along an anti-criminal direction. Public justice is central to the whole scheme of bail law. Fleeing justice

must be forbidden but punitive harshness should be minimised. Restorative devices to redeem the man, even through community service, meditative drill, study classes or other resources should be innovated, and playing foul with public peace by tampering with evidence, intimidating witnesses or committing offences while on judicially sanctioned 'free enterprise', should be provided against. No seeker of justice shall play confidence tricks on the court or community. Thus, conditions may be hung around bail orders, not to cripple but to protect. Such is the holistic jurisdiction and humanistic orientation invoked by the judicial discretion correlated to the values of our Constitution.

13. *Viewed from this perspective, we gain a better insight into the rules of the game. When a person, charged with a grave offence, has been acquitted at a stage, has the intermediate acquittal pertinence to a bail plea when the appeal before this Court pends? Yes, it has. The panic which might prompt the accused to jump the gauntlet of justice is less, having enjoyed the confidence of the court's verdict once. Concurrent holdings of guilt have the opposite effect. Again, the ground for denial of provisional release becomes weaker when the fact stares us in the face that a fair finding if that be so - of innocence has been recorded by one court. It may not be conclusive, for the judgment of acquittal may be ex facie wrong, the likelihood of desperate reprisal, if enlarged, may be a deterrent and his own safety may be more in prison than in the vengeful village where feuds have provoked the violent offence. It depends. Antecedents of the man and socio-geographical circumstances have a bearing only from this angle. Police exaggerations of prospective misconduct of the accused, if enlarged, must be soberly sized up lest danger of excesses and injustice creep subtly into the discretionary curial technique. Bad record and policy prediction of criminal prospects to invalidate the bail plea are admissible in principle but shall not stampede the court into a complacent refusal."*

14. The Hon'ble Supreme Court in "**Rabi Prakash Versus The State of Odisha**", **Special Leave to Appeal (Criminal) No.4169 of 2023**, has also discussed the effect of Section 37 of the NDPS Act in such like cases of long custody. The relevant portion of the aforesaid judgment contained in para No.4 is reproduced as under:-

"4. *As regard to the twin conditions contained in Section 37 of the NDPS Act, learned counsel for the respondent - State has been duly heard. Thus, the 1st condition stands complied with. So far as the 2nd condition re: formation of opinion as to whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that the petitioner is not guilty, the same may not be formed at this stage when he has already spent more than three and a half years in custody. The prolonged incarceration, generally*

militates against the most precious fundamental right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution and in such a situation, the conditional liberty must override the statutory embargo created under Section 37(1)(b)(ii) of the NDPS Act."

REASONS

15. On the touchstone of the above discussion this Court finds that the the present petitioners deserves to be released on regular bail for the reason that; (i) present petitioners are not a previous convict and are not involved in any other criminal case; (ii) the petitioners have suffered incarceration of about 2 years 01 month and 18 days, as on today; (iii) in the view of the long incarceration, the rigor of Section 37 of the NDPS Act, has been diluted as held in **Rabi Prakash's case (supra)**; (iv) the conclusion of the trial would take long time.

FINAL ORDER

16. Considering the hereinabove made discussion, this Court deems it fit and appropriate to grant the concession of regular bail to the petitioners. Therefore, without commenting upon the merits and circumstances of the present case, the present petitions are **allowed**. The petitioners are ordered to be released on bail on furnishing of their respective bail bonds and surety bonds to the satisfaction of concerned Chief Judicial Magistrate/trial Court/Duty Magistrate.

17. However, anything observed here-in-above shall have no effect on the merits of the trial, and is only meant for deciding the present petitions.

18. However, it is clarified that if in future, the petitioners are found indulging in commission of similar offences, as are involved

herein, the respondent-State shall be at liberty to make an appropriate application seeking cancellation of regular bail, as granted by this Court.

19. All pending application(s), if any, also stand **disposed** of accordingly.

20. A photocopy of this order be placed on the file of the connected case.

November 05, 2024
dharamvir

(KULDEEP TIWARI)
JUDGE

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