

IN THE HIGH COURT AT CALCUTTA

(Criminal Revisional Jurisdiction)

APPELLATE SIDE

Present:

The Hon'ble Justice Shampa Dutt (Paul)

CRR 178 of 2019

Khusboo Singhania

Vs

Praveen Singhania

For the Petitioner : Mr. Sanjoy Bose,
Mr. P.B. Mallick.

For the Opposite Party : None.

Heard on : 30.11.2022

Judgment on : 20.12.2022

Shampa Dutt (Paul), J.:

The present revision has been filed by the petitioner/wife against an order of interim maintenance dated 5th June 2018 passed by the Learned Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, Bidhannagar in M. Case No. 22 of 2017, granting an interim maintenance of Rs. 30,000/- (Rs. 15,000/- each for the petitioner and minor son), praying for revised and an enhancement of the amount of maintenance.

The case of the petitioner is that she was married to the opposite party herein on 26th June 2004 and the marriage was solemnized according to Hindu rites and customs.

After her marriage she handed over all her stridhan articles to her husband and in laws, including her Adhar Card and son's Birth Certificate subsequently when he was born on 8th December, 2005.

The petitioner has been mentally and physically tortured since her marriage. The opposite party being an alcoholic ill treated the petitioner every day. Finally she was ousted from her matrimonial home on 20.04.2015 without her stridhan articles.

Several attempts of reconciliation was made by the petitioners family, but the opposite party and his family did not allow her in her matrimonial home and threatened her in her parental home that he would remarry and get more money.

The petitioner lodged a complaint with the phoolbagan police station on 8th July, 2017, and also moved an application under section 156(3) of the code of criminal procedure before the Learned A.C.J.M. at Sealdah and thereafter Phoolbagan P. S. registered a F.I. R. and started Phoolbagan P.S. Case No. 116 of 2017 dated 28th August 2017 against the opposite party and his parents under section 498A/406/341PC and sections 3&4 of the dowry Act.

The petitioner after being ousted from her matrimonial home is at the mercy of her friends and relatives and has to beg every single penny for her livelihood and also for the upbringing of her minor son.

It was under these circumstances the petitioner was compelled to file an application under section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure before the Learned Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, Bidhannagar on 7th September 2017 which was registered as M. Case No. 22 of 2017 (Khusboo Singhania Vs Praveen Singhania) and claimed Rs. 3,00,000/- towards maintenance for herself and her minor son and Rs. 30,000/- towards medical expenses for herself and her minor son.

The Opposite party filed his objection. Finally the order under revision was passed.

Being aggrieved the petitioner has filed this revision praying for enhancement of the amount of maintenance.

Mr. Sanjoy Bose, Learned Counsel for the petitioner, has submitted that the amount of maintenance granted is grossly inadequate. The opposite party is the director of four companies and the order is totally without considering the actual financial situation of the parties and is thus illegal and bad in law, which needs revision by way of an enhancement, so that the petitioner can lead a life with at least the minimum requirement and their son can be properly educated. It is the opposite party's responsibility to maintain his family which includes his wife and son. The opposite party has the financial capacity to pay maintenance of such sum as prayed for so that the petitioner and her son can lead a normal and comfortable life matching the status of the opposite party's family. It is no fault of her that she has been driven out of her matrimonial home with her son and is not being allowed to continue her married life in spite of her best efforts. That the petitioner is leading a life of deprivation on being deserted without any fault on her part and fault on her part and as such the prayer for enhancement of the amount of maintenance has been stressed upon on the revisional application being allowed.

In spite of due service, the opposite party has neither appeared and thus not contested this case.

As seen from the certified copy of the order of the Learned Magistrate granting interim maintenance, **the case of the opposite**

party/husband before the trial court is that the petitioner and her family members always pressurized the opposite party to become a domesticated husband and as the opposite party did not concede to such a proposition, the petitioner and her family members have entangled the opposite party in several cases which are based on false and frivolous facts. The petitioner out of her own volition went back to her father's house with all her belongings on 20.01.2014. It has been further pleaded in the written objection before the learned Magistrate that the opposite party has tried to resume his matrimonial life with the petitioner but the petitioner refused to stay with the opposite party and the opposite party was even denied to meet his son and having no other alternative the opposite party filed a suit for restitution of conjugal rights and the case is still pending. As regards his income, the opposite party has averred that the quantum of income of the opposite party as manifested by the petitioner is illusory. The opposite party has further pleaded that **the petitioner being a teacher has her own income** and is able to maintain herself and their minor son. Based on this contention the opposite party has prayed for refusal of the petitioner's claim of interim maintenance.

The opposite party further submitted that the opposite party has very negligible income and the companies which have been mentioned by the petitioner are the family business and the opposite party and the income of the opposite has been verified by a CA and certificate to that

effect has been filed. The petitioner has made false statements in the petition and that must entail the dismissal of the petition. It was further argued that the petitioner was never subjected to any cruelty by the opposite party or his family members and the entire allegations ventilated in the petition are false and frivolous. The opposite party lay much emphasis on section 125 sub-section (4) of the Criminal procedure Code 1973 and argued that the petitioner is not entitled get any maintenance as the petitioner herself deserted the opposite party/husband. The order of interim maintenance passed by the Learned Magistrate is **05.06.2018**.

While disposing of the application under Section 125 Cr.P.C. finally, the Learned Magistrate can now follow the guidelines as laid down by the Supreme Court in ***Rajnish Vs Neha, (2021 SCC 324)***.

The said Judgment raises the issue of maintenance as a whole. All the Acts providing the said benefit has been considered, discussed and guidelines laid down. The final Direction there in is as follows:-

“VI

Final Directions

*In view of the foregoing discussion as contained in Part B – I 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***

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

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

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. 56 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

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

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., as 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.”

Keeping with the said guidelines both the parties to the case will file their Affidavit of Disclosure of Assets and liabilities before the trial Court, Considering the stand of the parties that the opposite party/husband is a director in three companies and that the petitioner /wife is also a working woman, as none of the parties have filed any documents before either the trial court nor before this court, which thus makes it difficult for this court to consider the prayer for enhancement.

There is another factor to be considered by the Learned Magistrate at the time of final disposal of the case as to whether the petitioner was driven out from her matrimonial home or had she deserted her husband without any just and sufficient reasons.

The opposite party/husband though has filed a suit for restitution of Conjugal Rights which is still pending.

The criteria determining quantum of maintenance as in *Rajnesh Vs Neha (Supra)* is:-

“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.

The factors which would weigh with the Court inter alia are the status of the parties; reasonable needs of the wife and dependant 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.

*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.

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.

(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.

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*³⁷ 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 u/s 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.

(a) Age and employment of parties

In a marriage of long duration, where parties have endured the relationship for several years, it would be a relevant factor to be taken into consideration. On termination of the relationship, if the wife is educated and professionally qualified, but had to give up her employment opportunities to look after the needs of the family being the primary caregiver to the minor children, and the elder members of the family, this factor would be required to be given due importance. This is of particular relevance in contemporary society, given the highly competitive industry standards, the separated wife would be required to undergo fresh training to acquire marketable skills and re-train herself to secure a job in the paid workforce to rehabilitate herself. With advancement of age, it would be difficult for a dependant wife to get an easy entry into the work-force after a break of several years.

(b) Right to residence Section 17 of the D.V. Act grants an aggrieved woman the right to live in the “shared household”. Section 2(s) defines “shared household” to include the household where the aggrieved woman lived at any stage of the domestic relationship; or the household owned and rented jointly or singly by both, or singly by either of the spouses; or a joint family house, of which the respondent is a member.

The right of a woman to reside in a “shared household” defined under Section 2(s) entitles the aggrieved woman for right of residence in the shared household, irrespective of her having any legal interest in the same. This Court in *Satish Chander Ahuja v Sneha Ahuja*³⁸ (supra) held that

“shared household” referred to in Section 2(s) is the shared household of the aggrieved person where she was living at the time when the application was filed, or at any stage lived in a domestic relationship. The living of the aggrieved woman in the shared household must have a degree of permanence. A mere fleeting or casual living at different places would not constitute a “shared household”. It is important to consider the intention of the parties, nature of living, and nature of the household, to determine whether the premises is a “shared household”. Section 2(s) read with Sections 17 and 19 of the D.V. Act entitles a woman to the right of residence in a shared household, irrespective of her having any legal interest in the same. There is no requirement of law that the husband should be a member of the joint family, or that the household must belong to the joint family, in which he or the aggrieved woman has any right, title or interest. The shared household may not necessarily be owned or tenanted by the husband singly or jointly.

Section 19 (1)(f) of the D.V. Act provides that the Magistrate may pass a residence order inter alia directing the respondent to secure the same level of alternate accommodation for the aggrieved woman as enjoyed by her in the shared household. While passing such an order, the Magistrate may direct the respondent to pay the rent and other payments, having regard to the financial needs and resources of the parties.

(c) Where wife is earning some income

The Courts have held that if the wife is earning, it cannot operate as a bar from being awarded maintenance by the husband. The Courts have provided guidance on this issue in the following judgments.

*In **Shailja & Anr. v Khobbanna, (2018) 12 SCC 199** this Court held that merely because the wife is capable of earning, it would not be a sufficient ground to reduce the maintenance awarded by the Family Court. The Court has to determine whether the income of the wife is*

sufficient to enable her to maintain herself, in accordance with the lifestyle of her husband in the matrimonial home. 40 Sustenance does not mean, and cannot be allowed to mean mere survival.

In **Sunita Kachwaha & Ors. v Anil Kachwaha (2014) 16 SCC 715** the wife had a postgraduate degree, and was employed as a teacher in Jabalpur. The husband raised a contention that since the wife had sufficient income, she would not require financial assistance from the husband. The Supreme Court repelled this contention, and held that merely because the wife was earning some income, it could not be a ground to reject her claim for maintenance.

The Bombay High Court in **Sanjay Damodar Kale v Kalyani Sanjay Kale 2020 SCC Online Bom 694** while relying upon the judgment in *Sunita Kachwaha (supra)*, held that neither the mere potential to earn, nor the actual earning of the wife, howsoever meagre, is sufficient to deny the claim of maintenance.

An able-bodied husband must be presumed to be capable of earning sufficient money to maintain his wife and children, and cannot contend that he is not in a position to earn sufficiently to maintain his family, as held by the **Delhi High Court in Chander Prakash Bodhraj v Shila Rani Chander Prakash, AIR 1968 Delhi 174**. The onus is on the husband to establish with necessary material that there are sufficient grounds to show that he is unable to maintain the family, and discharge his legal obligations for reasons beyond his control. If the husband does not disclose the exact amount of his income, an adverse inference may be drawn by the Court.

This Court in **Shamima Farooqui v Shahid Khan, (2015) 5 SCC 705** cited the judgment in **Chander Prakash (supra)** with approval, and held that the obligation of the husband to provide maintenance stands on a higher pedestal than the wife.

(d) Maintenance of minor children

The living expenses of the child would include expenses for food, clothing, residence, medical expenses, education of children. Extra coaching classes or any other vocational training courses to complement the basic education must be factored in, while awarding child support. Albeit, it should be a reasonable amount to be awarded for extra-curricular / coaching classes, and not an overly extravagant amount which may be claimed.

Education expenses of the children must be normally borne by the father. If the wife is working and earning sufficiently, the expenses may be shared proportionately between the parties.

(e) Serious disability or ill health

Serious disability or ill health of a spouse, child / children from the marriage / dependant relative who require constant care and recurrent expenditure, would also be a relevant consideration while quantifying maintenance.”

Accordingly considering the Materials on record, the order of interim maintenance under revision dated 5th June 2018 passed by the Learned Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, Bidhannagar in M. Case No. 22 of 2017 is hereby affirmed.

The Trial Court will decide the case finally as per the directions in the body of this judgment and make all endeavour to dispose of the case finally as expeditiously as possible.

CRR No. 178 of 2019 is thus dismissed.

All connected Application stand disposed of.

Interim order if any stands vacated.

There will be no order as to costs.

A copy of this judgment be sent to the learned Trial Court forthwith for necessary compliance.

Urgent certified website copy of this judgment, if applied for, be supplied expeditiously after complying with all, necessary legal formalities.

(Shampa Dutt (Paul), J.)