

CRA-S-219-SB-2007
Date of decision: 07.03.2025

....Appellant

...Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE HARPREET SINGH BRAR

Present: Mr. Harpreet S. Rakhra, Advocate
for the appellant.

Mr. Rishabh Singla, AAG, Punjab.

HARPREET SINGH BRAR, J. (ORAL)

1. The prayer in the present appeal is to set aside the judgment of conviction dated 22.11.2006 and order of sentence dated 23.11.2006 passed by learned Judge, Special Court, Bathinda, whereby, the appellant was convicted and sentenced for the offence punishable under Section 15 (b) of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (hereinafter 'NDPS Act'), in the case stemming from FIR No.22 dated 12.02.2001, under Section 15 of the NDPS Act at Police Station Sangat.

2. The appellant was sentenced as mentioned below:

Offence	Sentence
Section 15 (b) of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985	Rigorous imprisonment for a period of six months and to pay fine of Rs.2,500/- and in default of payment of fine, to further undergo rigorous imprisonment for three months.

3. Brief facts of the case are that on 12.02.2001, a police party headed by ASI Baldev Singh was on patrolling duty at village Dunewala and when they saw the appellant along with co-accused, sitting on plastic bag, he was apprehended with 15 Kg of Poppy Husk in the presence of one Bali Ram

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i.e. the independent witness and sample of 250 grams was drawn from the bag and then the same was sent to the chemical examiner. Subsequently, FIR (*supra*) was registered under Section 15 of the NDPS Act.

4. Learned counsel for the appellant submits that the learned Court below has fallen into grave error in convicting the appellant, as his guilt has not been proved beyond reasonable doubt. It is contended that the mandatory provisions under the NDPS Act have not been followed and the linking evidence is also missing. Further, there was no investigation with regard to the source of alleged recovery and merely, the appellant was found sitting on the bag in a public place does not prove that the alleged contraband was recovered from the conscious and exclusive possession of the appellant. Further, there was also an unexplained delay in sending the sample of the alleged contraband to the FSL Laboratory. The alleged independent witness Bali Ram has not been examined and that there are major discrepancies in the statements of the witnesses who have been examined by the prosecution. He further contends that he is not assailing the impugned judgment of conviction dated 22.11.2006 on merits and restricts his prayer to modification of the order of quantum of sentence, to that of the sentence already undergone by the appellant, as he has already undergone a period of 04 months and 14 days in custody and is not involved in any other criminal case.

5. *Per contra*, learned State counsel opposes the prayer of the appellant as the learned Court below has passed a well-reasoned judgment based on correct appreciation of evidence available on record as such, he does not deserve any leniency.

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6. Having heard learned counsel for the parties and after perusing the record with their able assistance, it transpires that the appellant was convicted for being in possession of 15 kg of Poppy Husk, i.e. intermediate quantity, attracting the offence of Section 15 NDPS Act, for which no minimum punishment has been prescribed. As per his custody certificate, he is not involved in any other case and has already undergone an actual sentence of 4 months and 14 days out of total sentence of 06 months, in the instant case. Since there is no minimum punishment prescribed under Section 15 NDPS Act, this Court is of the opinion that it would be in the interest of justice, if the sentence awarded to the appellant is reduced to the period already undergone by him.

7. In *Deo Narain Mandal vs. State of U.P. (2004) 7 SCC 257*, the Hon'ble Supreme Court has opined that awarding of sentence is not a mere formality in criminal cases. When a minimum and maximum term is prescribed by the statute with regard to the period of sentence, a discretionary element is vested in the Court. Background of each case, which includes factors like gravity of the offence, manner in which the offence is committed, age of the accused, should be considered while determining the quantum of sentence and this discretion is not to be used arbitrarily or whimsically. After assessing all relevant factors, proper sentence should be awarded bearing in mind the principle of proportionality to ensure the sentence is neither excessively harsh nor does it come across as lenient.

8. Further, the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Ravada Sasikala vs. State of AP AIR 2017 SC 1166*, has reiterated that the imposition of sentence also serves a social purpose as it acts as a deterrent by making the accused realise

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the damage caused not only to the victim but also to the society at large. The law in this regard is well settled that opportunities of reformation must be granted and such discretion is to be exercised by evaluating all attending circumstances of each case by noticing the nature of the crime, the manner in which the crime was committed and the conduct of the accused to strike a balance between the efficacy of law and the chances of reformation of the accused.

9. A perusal of the judgment of conviction passed by the learned trial Court indicates no perversity in its findings and the same is based on correct appreciation of evidence available on record. However, the FIR (supra) was lodged on 12.02.2001 and the appellant has been suffering the agony of trial for last more than 24 years. Since his conviction, he has grown into a law-abiding citizen and desires to live a peaceful life.

10. Therefore, in view of the discussion above, the present appeal is disposed of in the following terms:-

(i) The judgment dated 22.11.2006 passed by the learned Special Judge, Bathinda, is upheld.

(ii) The order of sentence dated 23.11.2006 is modified to the extent that the sentence of rigorous imprisonment for 06 months with fine along with default mechanism awarded to the appellant is reduced to the period of sentence already undergone by him.

11. Pending miscellaneous application(s), if any, shall also stand disposed of.

(HARPREET SINGH BRAR)
JUDGE

07.03.2025*Neha*

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