

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

State of Maharashtra

Vs.

Ichhalal Sunkhdeo

Crl.A.Nos.192 of 1961 and 183 of 1962

(K. Subba Rao, K. N. Wanchoo, J. C. Shah, S. M. Sikri and V. Ramaswami, JJ.)

05.10.1965

JUDGEMENT

SUBBA RAO, J. (Contra):

1. I regret my inability to agree on the construction of S. 167 (81) of the Sea Customs Act, 1878. The facts have been stated by my learned brother, Wanchoo, J. and I need not restate them.

2. Clause (81) of S. 167 of the Sea Customs Act reads :

If any person knowingly, and with intent to defraud the Government of any duty payable thereon, or to evade any prohibition or restriction for the time being in force under or by virtue of this Act with respect thereto acquires possession of , or is in any way concerned in carrying, removing depositing, harbouring, keeping or concealing or in any manner dealing with any goods which have been unlawfully removed from a warehouse or which are chargeable with a duty which has not been paid

or with respect to the importation or exportation of which any prohibition or restriction is for the time being in force as aforesaid";..... The penalty clause thereof reads : "such person shall on conviction before a Magistrate be liable to imprisonment for any term not exceeding two years or to fine, or to both". This clause introduces a criminal offence. It is tried by a magistrate. The person convicted is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to fine or to both. The rule of construction of such a clause creating a criminal offence is well settled. The following passage from the judgment of the Judicial Committee in *The Gauntlet*, (1872) 4CP 184 at p. may be quoted :

No doubt all penal statutes are to be construed strictly, that is to say, the Court must see that the thing charged as an offence is within the plain meaning of the words used, and must not strain the words on any notion that there has been a slip, that there has been a *casus omissus*, that the thing is so clearly within the mischief that it must have been intended to be included, and would have been included if thought of. On the other hand, the person charged has a right to say that the thing charged, although within the words, is not within the spirit of the enactment. But where the thing is brought within the words and within the spirit, there a penal enactment is to be construed, like any other instrument, according to the fair commonsense meaning of the language used, and the Court is not to find or make any doubt or ambiguity in the language of a penal statute where such doubt or ambiguity would clearly not be found or made in the same language in any other instrument".

The clause, therefore, must be construed strictly and it is not open to the Court to strain the language in order to read a *casus omissus*. The Court cannot fill up a *lacuna* : that is the province of the Legislature. The second rule of construction equally well settled is that a Court cannot construe a section of a statute with reference to that of another unless the latter is *in pari materia* with the former. It follows that decisions made on a provision of a different statute in India or elsewhere will be of no relevance unless the two statutes are *in pari materia*. Any deviation from this rule will destroy the fundamental principle of construction, namely the duty of a Court is to ascertain the expressed intention of the legislature. I am led to make these general remarks as an attempt was made by the learned counsel for the appellant to persuade us to interpret the words of the clause in the light of the decisions of the English courts on an analogous provision in an Act intended to prevent smuggling. It is not possible to state that the English and the Indian Acts are *in pari materia*, though their general purposes are the same and though there is some resemblance in the terminology used in them. The English decisions, therefore, must be kept aside in construing the relevant provisions of the Indian statute.

3. Now coming to the relevant clause, the following material ingredients constitute an offence thereunder : (1) a person must have a knowledge that there is a prohibition or restriction against doing any of the enumerated acts with respect to goods imported or exported contrary to the restriction or prohibition imposed against their import or export, (2) he must have acted with an intention to evade such a restriction or prohibition; there is no offence unless the said two elements of *mens rea*, namely knowledge and intention, are established. It is not enough if a person has only knowledge of such a prohibition or restriction in addition he shall have the intention to evade such a prohibition or restriction against the import or export of goods as the case may be. A person who knowingly purchases smuggled goods from, an importer cannot have an intention to evade a

prohibition against import, for the prohibited goods have already been imported. A person who receives goods with the knowledge that they are stolen goods cannot possibly have an intention to commit theft, for the theft had already been committed though he may have the intention to receive the stolen goods. Knowledge of an offence cannot be equated with an intention to commit the offence. Such a construction effaces the distinction between the two distinct elements of mens rea, knowledge and intention, laid down in the clause.

4. The only possible way out of the inevitable effect of the plain words used in the said clause is to give a meaning to the expression "import" which that word cannot bear. To accept the argument of the learned counsel for the appellant is to hold that the process of import continues through innumerable transactions between different persons without reference to time or place and whether the goods existed or ceased to exist. Ordinarily the process of import commences the moment the goods cross the customs barrier. That is the meaning given to that word by this Court in *J. V. Gokal and Co. v. Assistant Collector of Sales Tax* (1960) 2 SCR 852 (857, 858) : (AIR 1960 SC 595 at pp. 597, 598). But the said clause gives that expression a wider meaning. The enumerated dealings with the goods prohibited or restricted covered a field beyond the point of import normally understood by that expression. But all the said dealings have an intimate nexus with the import of goods under the Act. Goods may be imported through the machinery provided under the Act; yet, a person may evade the restrictions by fraud or otherwise. Goods may also be illegally imported into India outside the machinery so provided. This is done stealthily at different points of the vast sea line of our country. But in either case different persons may take part in carrying, removing, depositing, harbouring, keeping or concealing or in any other manner dealing with any goods so imported. They are the necessary acts to complete the process of import. Such acts may be done by persons between whom there was a pre-arranged plan before the goods were brought into India. Different persons may also take part in such dealings with the requisite knowledge or intention for the purpose of completing the import vis-a-vis the importer. Under the said clause, therefore, the process of import does not end immediately the prohibited goods are brought into India but continues till the goods are delivered to the importer, physically or constructively. The importer who smuggles the goods is certainly guilty under the clause, because he imports them in derogation of the prohibition or restriction. Any person who deals with the goods in the context of the import as explained above in any one of the connected way with the requisite knowledge and intention would equally be guilty of the offence. But the subsequent transactions in regard to the said goods are outside the process of the enlarged definition of the expression "import" It would be incongruous to hold that a purchaser from the importer or a purchase from the said purchaser, and so on, has an intention to evade the prohibition or restriction though he may have the intention to receive the smuggled goods. How does such a purchaser evade the prohibition against import which has already been effected ? The contrary construction will lead to the anomaly of purchaser, even after 20 years of the import being attributed the intention to evade the prohibition against import. Suppose before the purchase of the goods by a stranger the prohibition was lifted. In such a situation, does the purchaser commit an offence ? If the contention is sound, he does. This illustrates that the crux of the offence is the import of goods with the requisite intent contrary to the prohibition. For the said reasons the intention to contravene the prohibition cannot be imputed to subsequent dealers in the said goods after the importer parts with them.

5. It is said that if the construction suggested by the learned counsel for the appellant be not

accepted many a person who purchases smuggled goods will escape punishment. A fair reading of the act discloses that the Act makes distinction between a customs offence and a criminal offence. The smuggled goods in the hands of whomsoever they are found can be confiscated and, therefore, the States can always trace the smuggled goods to their ultimate destination. The smuggler and the persons concerned in the smuggling are guilty of both customs and criminal offences. The Legislature, either intentionally or otherwise, has not made the dealings in such goods by persons other than those mentioned in Cl.(81) of S. 167 of the Sea Customs Act a criminal offence. When the clause does not bring them in, the court cannot, by construction, bring such a class of persons within the said clause. It is for the legislature to do so and we are told that it has recently amended the section.

6. I, therefore agree with the High Court that it has not been established that the respondents have dealt with the goods with an intention to evade any restriction or prohibition imposed on the import of the said goods.

In the result, all the appeals should be dismissed.

In Cr. As. Nos. 192 of 1961 and 183 of 1962.

7. WANCHOO, J. (For himself. J. C. SHAH, S. M. SIKRI AND V. RAMASWAMI, JJ.):

These two appeals on certificates granted by the Calcutta High Court arise out of the same trail of the two respondents for an offence under S 167 (81) of the Sea Customs Act No. 8 of 1878 (hereinafter refer to as the Act) and will be dealt with together. The facts are not in dispute and have been found as below :

8. On August 25, 1958, a constable attached to the Detective Department, noticed Sitaram Agarwala respondent and another person at the crossing of Hariram Goenka street and Kalakar street. The constable had certain information with respect to these person and decided to follow them. These two person got into a bus and the constable also boarded the same bus. They got down at the junction of B. K . Pal Avenue and J M. Avenue and so did the constable. They then went to Narendra Dev Square which is a kind of park. The constable kept watch over them from a distance. After a short time these two men came out of the park and stood on the western foot-path of J. M. Avenue. Shortly thereafter a small taxi came there from the South and stopped. Respondent Wang Chait Khaw (hereinafter referred to as the Chinese accused) was in that taxi. He came down and shook hands with Sitaram Agarwala and the three got into the taxi when the taxi was about to start. The con stable table disclosed his identity to the driver and asked him to stop. He also asked the three persons to accompany him to the thana. Thereupon Sitaram Agarwala and the other man who

was with him came out of the taxi and tried to run away. The constable caught hold of them and put them in the police wagon which happened to come up just then. The Chinese accused also tried to run away. The constable appealed to the members of the public to help him in securing the Chinese accused and he was secured with the help of two college students and one other youngman. As the Chinese accused was running away, he threw away three packets which were picked up. In the meantime Sergeant Mukherjee came there on a motor-cycle from the opposite direction and detained the Chinese accused. The three packets thrown away by him were also handed over by the three youngmen to the Sergeant. Thereafter all the three persons who were arrested were taken to the police station along with the three packets. It was found in the police station that the three packets contained 23 gold bars of about sixteen tolas each with Chinese inscription thereon. On search of the person of Sitaram Agarwala, a sum of Rs. 49,320 in notes of various denomination was found on him. The customs authorities were informed and took charge of the gold bars. Eventually, the gold bars were confiscated under S. 167(8) of the Act and thereafter the police after investigation prosecuted the two respondents and the third man in respect of the offence under S. 167 (81) of the Act.

9. These facts were held to be proved by the magistrate so far as the Chinese accused and Sitaram were concerned. He therefore convicted them. The case against the third man was held to be doubtful and he was acquitted. The two convicted persons then filed separate appeals in the High Court. The High Court accepted the findings of fact recorded by the learned magistrate and came to the conclusion that on the facts proved there was no doubt that Sitaram had gone with a large sum of money to meet the Chinese accused in order to purchase the gold bars which had been recovered from the packets thrown away by the Chinese accused.

10. The High Court then addressed itself to the question whether on the facts proved the conviction of the two respondents could be sustained in law. The charge against Sitaram Agarwala was that on the date in question and at the time and place which appeared in the evidence he had gone there by previous arrangement to purchase the smuggled gold bars from the Chinese accused and was therefore concerned in dealing with smuggled gold and thereby committed an offence under S. 167 (81) of the Act. The charge against the Chinese accused was that he had in his possession 23 smuggled gold bars which he wanted to sell to Sitaram Agarwala and another person by previous arrangement and as such he was concerned in dealing with smuggled gold and was guilty under S. 167(81) of the Act. So far as Sitaram Agarwala was concerned, the High Court held that by merely going to the park in order to purchase smuggled gold by previous arrangement, it could not be said that Sitaram Agarwala was in any manner dealing with smuggled gold. The High Court was of the view that there was a mere attempt to purchase smuggled gold on the part of Sitaram Agarwala, but as the purchase was not completed it could not be said that Sitaram Agarwala was concerned in dealing with the smuggled gold. The High Court therefore ordered the acquittal of Sitaram Agarwala respondent. As to the Chinese accused, the High Court held that though he was found in possession of smuggled gold, which he knew to be such and had attempted to sell that gold surreptitiously, S. 167(81) required knowledge that the article in question was smuggled and intention to defraud the Government of any duty payable thereon or to evade any prohibition or restriction for the time being in force under; or by virtue of the Act. In view of the intent necessary, the High Court was of the view that before a person could be convicted under S. 167 (81) it must be shown that he was either a direct importer or concerned in some way in the import of the smuggled

article. In other words, the High Court thought that the section dealt with goods while they were being smuggled; it did not include in its scope a person who subsequently obtained the smuggled goods and then dealt with them, though the smuggled goods themselves might be liable to confiscation when seized. Consequently, the High Court ordered the acquittal of the Chinese accused also. As the interpretation of S. 167(81) was involved, the High Court granted certificates, and that is how the two appeals have come up before us.

11. The facts are not in dispute in this case and have been set out above. Thus the question that arises before us is the interpretation of S. 167(81) and two aspects of that section have to be considered. The first aspect is the ambit of the words "in any way concerned in any manner dealing with any goods with respect to the importation of which any prohibition or restriction is for the time being in force as aforesaid". The second aspect is with respect to the intent necessary under the section and whether that intent can arise where smuggling is over and smuggled goods are in the possession of persons other than these actually concerned in the smuggling and are then dealt with by them in some manner or other.

12. We may briefly indicate the scheme of the Act in order to appreciate the purpose behind S. 167(81). The object of the Act is to provide machinery for the collection inter alia of import duties and for the prevention of smuggling. With that object customs frontiers are defined, (Ch. 1); customs officers are appointed with certain powers, (Ch. II); ports, wharves, customhouses, warehouses and boarding and landing stations are provided for, (Ch. III); prohibitions and restrictions of imports and exports are envisaged, (Ch. IV); levy of and exemption from custom duties and the manner in which it has to be done is provided, (Ch. V); drawbacks i.e. refunds are provided in certain circumstances, (Ch. VI); arrival and departure of vessels is controlled, (Ch. VII and Ch. VIII); provision is made for the discharge of cargo, (Ch. IX), and clearance of goods for home consumption (Ch. X); provision is also made for warehousing and transshipment, (Chapters XI, XII); provisions are also made for exportation or shipment and re-landing (Ch. XIII) special provisions have been made relating to spirit (Ch. XIV) and coasting trade (Ch. XV). Then comes Ch. XVI dealing with offences and penalties. Offences enumerated in Ch. XVI are of two kinds; first there are contraventions of the Act and rules thereunder which are dealt with by customs officers and the penalty for which is imposed by them. These may be compendiously called customs offences. Besides these there are criminal offences which are dealt with by magistrates and which result in conviction and sentence of imprisonment and/or fine. These two kinds of offences have been created to ensure that no fraud is committed in the matter of payment of duty and also to ensure that there is no smuggling of goods, without payment of duty or in defiance of any prohibition or restriction imposed under Ch. IV of the Act.

13. It is necessary for our purpose to set out two provisions of S. 167 which are in Ch. XVI. These are Ss. 167(8) and 167(81). Section 167(8) is in these terms:

"167. The offences mentioned in the first column of the following schedule shall be punishable to

the extent mentioned in the third column of the same with reference to such offences respectively;

Offences	Section of this Act to which Offence has reference	Penalties
----------	--	-----------

(8) If any goods, the importation or exportation of which is for the time being prohibited or restricted by or under Chap. IV of this Act, be imported into or exported from India contrary to such prohibition or restriction; or 18 and 19 such goods shall be liable to confiscation; and

Etc. Etc. any person concerned in any such offence shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding three times the value of the goods, or not exceeding one thousand rupees."

Section 167(81) with which we are particularly concerned reads thus:

"(81) If any person knowingly and with intent to defraud the Government of any duty payable thereon or to evade any prohibition or restriction for the time being in force under or by virtue of this Act with respect thereto acquires possession of, or is in any way concerned in carrying, removing, depositing harbouring, keeping or concealing or in any manner dealing with any goods which have been unlawfully removed from a warehouse or which are chargeable with a duty which has not been paid or with respect to the importation or exportation of which any prohibition or restriction is for the time being in force as aforesaid; or General such person shall on conviction before a Magistrate be liable to imprisonment for any term not exceeding two years or to fine, or to both;

XX XX XX

It will be seen that S. 167(8) deals with what we have called customs offences while S. 167(81) deals with criminal offences. It is well settled by the decisions of this Court that goods which have been imported against the prohibition or restriction imposed under Ch. IV of the Act are liable to confiscation at any time after import and this liability extends even in the hands of third persons who may not have had anything to do with the actual import. So long as it is proved that the goods had been imported against the restrictions imposed under Ch. IV, the goods remain liable to confiscation whenever found even if this is long after the import is over and even if they are in

possession of persons who had nothing to do with the actual import. It is also well settled by the decisions of this Court that the second part of the penalty relating to any person applies only to a person concerned in the importation or exportation of the goods and does not apply to a person found in possession of the smuggled goods who had nothing to do with the importation or exportation thereof; (see *Shivhnarayana Mahato v. Collector of Central Excise and Land Customs*, C. A. No. 288 of 1964, dated 14-8-1965 (SC)).

14. The main contention of the respondents which has found favour with the High Court was that S. 167(81) when it deals with persons and subjects them to imprisonment and fine on conviction by a magistrate is also concerned with persons who are in some way or other actually concerned in the import and has no application to third persons who had nothing to do with the actual import but might have come in possession of smuggled goods even knowingly after they had been smuggled. Before however we consider this contention which has found favour with the High Court we should like to dispose of the other contention which was raised on behalf of Sitaram Agarwala and which also found favour with the High Court. It will be seen that S. 167 (81) deals with persons who do certain things with the knowledge and intent therein specified and one such person with whom that provision deals is a person who is in any way concerned in any manner dealing with any goods with respect to importation of which any prohibition or restriction is for the time being in force. The High Court has held on the facts in this case that Sitaram Agarwala cannot be said to have been concerned in any manner dealing with prohibited goods inasmuch as he was merely negotiating with the Chinese accused for their purchase but the deal had not been concluded. The view which found favour with the High Court thus was that if the deal had been completed, Sitaram Agarwala could be said to have been concerned in dealing with the prohibited goods but as the deal was not completed and he was merely attempting to purchase the goods it could not be said that he was in any way concerned in any manner dealing with them. We are of opinion that the view taken by the High Court is not correct. The words "in any way concerned in any manner dealing with prohibited goods" are of very wide import. It is neither desirable nor necessary to define all manner of connection with the prohibited goods which might come within the meaning of the words "in any way concerned in any manner dealing with such goods". It will depend on the facts found in each case whether it can be said that any person was concerned in dealing with such goods. We shall therefore confine ourselves to the facts of the present case and see whether on these facts it can be said that Sitaram was in any way concerned in any manner dealing with the goods. Now the evidence which has been accepted by both the courts is that Sitaram had gone with a large sum of money to purchase the gold which was known to be smuggled and to have been imported into India against the registrations imposed on the import of gold. It has also been proved that Sitaram did so after previous arrangement with the Chinese accused. If the constable who was following Sitaram had not interfered the deal would have gone through and Sitaram would have paid the money and purchased the smuggled gold. This was a case therefore where by means of previous arrangement with a person in possession of a smuggled article, the intending purchaser had gone to purchase it and the deal did not go through only because the police intervened. In such circumstances whereby previous agreement or arrangement a person goes to purchase an article which he knows to be smuggled it would in our opinion be a case where such a person must be held to be concerned in dealing with the prohibited goods. Where a person does any overt act in relation to prohibited goods which he knows to be such and the act is done in consequence of a previous arrangement or agreement it would in our opinion be a case where the person doing the act is concerned in dealing with the prohibited goods. In other words any transaction relating to prohibited goods which is done or attempted to be done after some kind of prior arrangement or agreement would in our opinion

clearly amount to the person being concerned in dealing with the prohibited goods. Both the words "concerned" and "deal" have a wide connotation. The words "concerned in" mean "interested in, involved in, mixed up with" while the words "deal with" mean "to have something to do with, to concern one-self, to treat, to make arrangement, to negotiate with respect to something".

Therefore when a person enters into some kind of transaction or attempts to enter into some kind of transaction with respect to prohibited goods and it is clear that the act is done with some kind of prior arrangement or agreement, it must be held that such a person is concerned in dealing with prohibited goods. The fact that the act stopped at an attempt to purchase as in the present case when the police intervened does not in any way mean that Sitaram was not concerned in dealing with the smuggled gold. The evidence shows that there must have been a previous arrangement with the Chinese accused to purchase the smuggled gold. Sitaram went to the appointed place and met the Chinese accused surreptitiously and had a large sum of money with him to pay for the gold. He had sat down with the Chinese accused in the taxi and there is no doubt that if the taxi had not been stopped, the transaction for the purchase of the smuggled gold would have gone through. In these circumstances even though Sitaram had not come into actual possession of the smuggled gold before the police intervened, there is no doubt that he was concerned in dealing with prohibited goods. We are therefore of opinion that the High Court was in error in holding simply because the purchase was not complete that Sitaram was not concerned in dealing with the smuggled gold which was found with the Chinese accused. The acquittal of Sitaram on this ground must therefore be set aside.

15. This brings us to the main question which arises in the present appeal, namely, what is the intent required in a case coming under S. 167 (81) and whether such intent can be said to arise at all in a case where the import is complete and the prohibited goods are in the possession of a third person who had nothing to do with the import. For this purpose, we shall refer to that part of S. 167(81) which deals with the acquisition or possession of prohibited goods and what we say about that part will equally apply to the other parts of S. 167(81). We may add that we are dealing here with the first half of S. 167(81) and not with the second half. This part of S. 167(81) which we have taken for the purpose of finding out what is the knowledge and intent that S. 167(81) requires would run thus: "If any person knowingly, and with intent to defraud the Government of any duty payable thereon or to evade any prohibition or restriction for the time being in force under or by virtue of the Act with respect thereto acquires possession of any goods with respect to which duty has not been paid or with respect to the importation of which any prohibition or restriction is for the time being in force". The argument which has found favour with the High Court is that the section requires knowledge on the part of the accused that the goods were imported against the prohibition or restriction in force. This is undoubtedly so. The section further requires that the person who has this knowledge should also have the intention either to defraud the Government of any duty payable thereon or to evade any prohibition or restriction for the time being in force under or by virtue of the Act. Mere knowledge that the goods are prohibited goods or goods on which duty has not been paid would not be enough; the section further requires that there should be an intent to defraud the Government of the duty payable or to evade any prohibition or restriction. The argument on behalf of the respondents which has been accepted by the High Court is that once the goods have evaded the payment of duty or have evaded the prohibition or restriction with respect to their import and the smuggling whether of dutiable or prohibited goods is complete, a third person who comes into

possession of such goods thereafter and who had nothing to do with the smuggling itself cannot be said to have the intent to defraud the government of any duty payable (for such defrauding had already taken place) or to evade any prohibition or restriction (for such prohibition or restriction had already been evaded). In effect, the argument is that this part of S. 167 (81) corresponds to S. 167(8) where a person has to be concerned in the actual importation before he can be liable to a penalty.

16. Now if the intention of the legislature was that the person guilty under S. 167 (81) could only be a person who was concerned in some way or other with the actual importation or exportation it would have been easy for it to use the same words in S. 167(81) as were used in the first part of S. 167(81). But the legislature has not done so and the question is whether the words used in S. 167(81) have a different meaning from those used in S. 167(8). What S. 167(81) requires is that the person who comes *inter alia* into possession of prohibited goods must know that there is some prohibition in force with respect thereto. But before he can be guilty under S. 167(81) it has further to be shown that he intends to evade the prohibition. Where the case is not of prohibition but of duty, the person accused under S. 167(81) must be shown to know that the duty has not been paid and also to have the intention to defraud the government of the duty payable on the goods. The question that arises is whether the third person who has come into possession knowingly that the goods are prohibited or the goods are dutiable and the duty has not been paid can be said to have the intention of evading the prohibition or to defraud the government of the duty payable, even though he may not have anything to do with the smuggling of the goods.

17. It seems to us (taking a case of prohibition) that if the prohibition is still in force, the person who acquires possession of prohibited goods knowing them to be prohibited intends to evade the prohibition by the action, even though he may not have been concerned in the actual smuggling of the goods. So long as the prohibition lasts any person who comes into possession of prohibited goods, though he may not be concerned in the actual smuggling would still in our opinion have the intent to evade the prohibition when he remains in possession of the goods which are prohibited. The prohibition in our opinion does not come to an end as soon as the customs frontier is crossed. So long as prohibition is in force and the goods are prohibited goods any person in possession thereof, even though he may not be concerned with the actual smuggling would still be guilty of evading the prohibition by keeping the goods in his possession. If this were not so, it would mean that once the prohibition has been successfully evaded by the actual smuggler the goods would be free from the taint of prohibition and could be dealt with by any person as if there is no prohibition with respect to them. If that were to be the meaning of S. 167(81), there would be a serious lacuna in this provision which is meant to prevent smuggling. Smuggling does not only stop at importing the goods in the face of prohibition; it envisages subsequent transactions like sale of the smuggled goods, for no one would take the risk of smuggling unless he can find a market for smuggled goods. Therefore the purchaser of smuggled goods though he may not be concerned in the smuggling would in our opinion be equally guilty of evading the prohibition by making the purchase. The same in our opinion applies to defrauding the government of the duty. Where goods had been smuggled in without paying duty the smuggler in such a case also intends to sell the goods and make profit thereby. The purchaser of such smuggled goods even though he may have nothing to do with actual smuggling usually acquires the goods at a lower price because the payment of duty has been evaded. Therefore when such goods reach even third hands there is always the intention to defraud the government of the duty payable on the goods. This appears to us to be the true interpretation of S.

167(81), which as we have said earlier is in different words from the first part of S. 167(8), which deals with actual importation or exportation. Section 167(81) does not deal with actual importation or exportation, it deals with defrauding the government of the duty payable or evading the prohibition or restriction. So long as the duty is payable and has not been paid or so long as the prohibition or restriction remains in force any person acquiring possession of goods on which duty has not been paid or restriction or prohibition has been evaded would have the intent either to defraud the government of the duty payable for he acquires goods at a lower price or would have the intention to evade restriction or prohibition. If this were not so, there would be a premium on successful smuggling and once the goods have entered the country without paying duty or have entered the country after evading the prohibition or restriction, they can be dealt with as if they were duty paid goods or goods which had not evaded the prohibition or restriction. The purpose of S. 167(81), is to punish smuggling and stop it if possible. That purpose in our opinion would be completely defeated if the interpretation which has found favour with the High Court were accepted. We cannot therefore accept that the words used in S. 167(81) only apply up to the stage of actual importation and the person who is guilty thereunder must be somehow concerned in the actual importation. It seems to us that they apply in the case of prohibited or restricted goods so long as the prohibition or restriction lasts and whoever is in possession of such goods or comes into possession thereof, even after the smuggling is over must be attributed with the intention of evading the prohibition or restriction provided he knows that the goods were smuggled into the country in spite of the prohibition or restriction. Similarly where the goods are dutiable and the duty has not been paid on them any person acquires them with the knowledge that the duty thereon has not been paid would have the intention to defraud the government of duty, even though he may not be the person actually concerned in the smuggling. We therefore hold that S. 167(81) has a wider sweep than S. 167(8) and it does not only apply to a person who may have been actually concerned in some way or other with smuggling but also inter alia to persons who may have come into possession of goods even after the smuggling was over. So long as the prohibition or restriction remains in force or the duty has not been paid even a third person coming into possession of such goods would have the intention either to evade the prohibition or restriction or to defraud the government of the duty payable thereon.

18. It remains now to refer to a few English cases because our Act of 1878 was modeled on the English Customs Consolidation Act, 1876. Decisions of English courts therefore with respect to corresponding provisions of the English Act would in our opinion be helpful in the matter of the interpretation of S. 167(81).

19. Section 186 of the English Act corresponds to many of the provisions contained in S. 167 of the Act. In particular, the provision corresponding to S. 167(81) is in these terms:

"Every person who.....shall be in any way knowingly concerned in carrying, removing, depositing, concealing, or in any manner dealing with any such goods with intent to defraud Her Majesty of any duties due thereon or to evade any prohibition or restriction of or application to such goods....."

"Such goods" in the context of the section mean either prohibited or restricted goods or goods on which duty is leviable.

20. The other clauses of S. 186 of the English Act do not specifically contain words relating to intent. But in *Frailer v. Charlton*, 1920-1 KB 147 it was decided, that intent to defraud the revenue or to evade a restriction or prohibition would apply to other clauses of S. 186 also. Thus the English Act by S. 186 also requires that a person who was concerned in carrying, removing, etc., or in any manner dealing with any prohibited or restricted goods or dutiable goods must do so knowingly and with intent to defraud His Majesty of any duty due thereon or to evade any restriction or prohibition.

21. The interpretation of this provision in S. 186 was considered in *Beck v. Binks*, 1949-1 KB 250. In that case the facts were that a person was found in possession of uncustomed goods in London and it was urged, as was urged before the High Court in the present case, and the person concerned could not be said to be carrying the uncustomed goods with intent to defraud His Majesty of the duty because such an offence could only be committed by the actual smugglers or importers of goods or persons engaged in carrying the goods from the ship etc. at the port of importation with intent to evade the payment of duty or tax. This contention was negatived and the court held that "the offence of knowingly carrying or in any manner dealing with uncustomed goods with intent to defraud His Majesty of the duty due thereon contrary to S. 186 is not only committed at the port of entry or the place where the goods are actually landed; it is committed anywhere in the realm by a person acting in the manner described by the sub-section". Lord Goddard, C. J. made the following observations at p. 252;

"If a person is knowingly carrying uncustomed goods, he is assisting in the smuggling of the goods; for while goods are no doubt smuggled when they are brought into the country it is no good bringing smuggled goods into the country unless something can be done with them. Such a person is intending to defraud His Majesty of the customs as much as anybody else. The intent is there: It is all part of one operation.....Otherwise, a most extraordinary lacuna is left in the Act, for it can then be said that, once a man has got away from the port of entry or from the place where the "goods were actually landed, no one dealing with the smuggled goods and carrying them inland will ever be guilty of an offence. I do not think that has ever yet been held to be the law and I am certainly not prepared so to hold now. I think it is clear that the appellant was dealing with - that is carrying - uncustomed goods and that he was carrying them with intent to defraud His Majesty of the duties thereon."

22. The next case to which reference may be made is *Rex v. Cohen*, 1951-1 KB 505. In that case 352 Swiss watches which were uncustomed were recovered from the accused and he was charged with being in possession of uncustomed goods with intent to defraud His Majesty of the duties thereon contrary to S. 186 of the English Act. Dealing with the question of intent to defraud, it was

held that if the accused knew that the goods were uncustomed, the intention to defraud the revenue may be inferred. Here also the uncustomed goods were recovered from the house of the accused at Edgware and there was nothing to show that he was in any way concerned with actual smuggling. Even so, the court held that he must be held to be intending to defraud the revenue.

23. The next case to which reference may be made is *Sayce v. Coupe*, 1953-1 QB 1. In that case the accused was in possession of certain American cigarettes on which duty had not been paid. It was held that where a person has in possession goods which are to his knowledge uncustomed and which he intends to use or sell, he is guilty of the offence of keeping uncustomed goods with intent to defraud the revenue of the duties thereon contrary to S. 186. In that case there was nothing to show that the accused had anything to do with the importation or smuggling of the goods. Even so, it was held that he had the intent to defraud the revenue.

24. The next case to which reference may be made is *Schneider v. Dawson*, 1960-2 QB 106. That was a case where a civilian bought from American servicemen cigars and spirits which had been imported free of duty for the use of United States Servicemen under an agreement between the British and American Governments and kept them for his own use. He was charged with knowingly and with intent to defraud Her Majesty of the duty payable thereon being concerned in keeping goods which were chargeable with duty on which duty had not been paid. It was held that the person's conduct clearly amounted to keeping the smuggled goods and there was intent to defraud the revenue. This case was under the English Customs and Excise Act of 1952, but the principle under the English Act of 1876 was followed.

25. These cases clearly indicate that the offence under the corresponding provision of the English Act can be committed long after the actual smuggling is over and even if the person found in possession of goods on which duty had not been paid had nothing to do with smuggling. These cases thus clearly support the interpretation we have put on the relevant words of S. 167(81).

26. Further the case of *Schneider* 1960-2 QB 106 shows that it has always been held in England that if dutiable goods have been brought into the country without paying the duty, the duty attaches to goods brought into the country and though it may not have been paid at the moment of bringing the goods for some special reasons (as, for example, where it is meant for a foreign ambassador) the duty is leviable later on when the goods pass into the hands of persons other than the privileged person. The same in our view applies equally to goods which are smuggled into the country and the duty has been evaded. The duty always remains payable on goods which have been brought in without payment of duty and whoever deals with them even at a later stage after the operation of smuggling is over would still be liable to pay the duty and if he does not, he must have the intention to defraud the government of revenue. The same applies to prohibition and restriction and so long as the prohibition or restriction remains in force the person dealing with the smuggled goods which had evaded the prohibition or restriction must also be held to evade the prohibition or restriction. In the view that we have taken it is therefore unnecessary to consider when the import or smuggling

ends, for S. 167(81) hits not only persons concerned in smuggling or importing but also all others who come into possession of or deal with smuggled goods after the smuggling is over.

27. Lastly learned counsel for the respondents refers us to S. 135 of the Customs Act (No. 52 of 1962). That section provides for what was formerly provided in S. 167(81) of the Act. The argument is that it is in very different terms. That is undoubtedly so. But it does not follow from the fact that the corresponding section in the 1962 - Act is differently worded that the provision in S. 167(81) cannot have the meaning which is being pressed before us on behalf of the appellant. The interpretation of S. 167(81) must depend upon the language of that provision itself and on the language used in S. 167(81) we have no doubt that it applies not only to an actual smuggler or a person concerned in smuggling but also to all others who may be concerned with smuggled goods after the smuggling is over.

28. In the view that we have taken of the meaning of S. 167(81) it follows that on facts found Sitaram Agarwala was concerned in dealing with prohibited or restricted goods. It also follows on facts found that he had the necessary knowledge and intent to evade the prohibition or the restriction even though he dealt with the goods after the smuggling was over and was not in any way concerned with actual smuggling. He would therefore be guilty under S. 167(81) of the Act. We therefore allow the appeal set aside the order of acquittal made by the High Court, restore the order of the Presidency Magistrate and confirm the sentence passed on Sitaram Agarwala by the Magistrate.

29. It also follows on facts found that Wang Chit Khaw is guilty under S. 167 (81) inasmuch as he was dealing with prohibited or restricted goods and had the necessary knowledge and intent as required under that section. We therefore allow the appeal, set aside the order of the High Court, restore that of the Presidency Magistrate and confirm the sentence passed on him by the Magistrate.

In Cri. A. No. 123 of 1962.

30. WANCHOO, J.:

This is an appeal by special leave against the judgment of the Calcutta High Court by which the respondent Amin Khan was acquitted of an offence under S. 167(81) of the Sea Customs Act (No. 8 of 1878).

31. The charge against the respondent was that he on or about July 15, 1959, at Circular Garden

Reach Road, knowingly and with intent to evade the prohibition in force under S. 19 of the Sea Customs Act read with S. 23-A of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947, acquired possession of sixty bars of gold with respect to importation of which the said prohibition was in force on the date aforesaid. The learned Magistrate before whom the trial took place found that Amin Khan came in a taxi which stood opposite Gate No. 5 of Kidderpore dock. At that time a ship from the Far East, namely, S. S. Sangola was berthed at Kidderpore dock and there was some information with the customs authorities in connection with that ship and consequently Customs Inspector Samsul Huq was on duty at the gate to keep an eye on things. The taxi in which the respondent Amin Khan came arrived at about 7-10 a.m. on July 15, 1959 and waited opposite gate No. 5. Kidderpore dock. There was one occupant on the rear seat of the taxi, namely, Amin Khan while the driver of the taxi was sitting in the driver's seat. Amin Khan had come down from the taxi and appeared to be restless. Shortly thereafter, Amin Khan got back into the taxi. But as there was a crowd there, Samsul Huq, though he could see Amin Khan while he was on the road and was getting into the taxi, could not keep the taxi in full view. Soon after Amin Khan got into the taxi and it started. Thereupon Samsul Huq stopped the taxi and rushed forward along with other customs officers. Amin Khan was then sitting in the rear seat of the taxi with the small attache case beside him. Samsul Huq asked Amin Khan what the attache case contained and Amin Khan replied that it contained gold. Thereafter the attache case was opened and it was found to contain 60 gold bars in six packets under a cotton jacket which was also in the attache case. Each packet contained 10 gold bars. Thereafter Amin Khan was arrested. Later the gold bars were confiscated under the Act and Amin Khan was prosecuted under S. 167(81). The Magistrate after finding these facts convicted Amin Khan and sentenced him to one year's rigorous imprisonment, his defence that the attache case had been planted by a customs officer having been disbelieved by the Magistrate. It may be mentioned that the gold bars were worth about Rs. 1,15,000. He unsuccessfully appealed to the Session Judge, Alipore.

32. Amin Khan then went in revision to the High Court. The High Court considered the evidence and held that there was no doubt that the gold bars were foreign and imported. It was proved that in view of the restriction in force foreign gold could not be imported by anybody without a special permit of the Reserve Bank of India and Amin Khan did not claim to have any such permit. Finally the High Court found that there was no doubt that Amin Khan was in possession of this smuggled gold. The High Court then went on to consider the question whether the charge framed against Amin Khan had been proved. We have already mentioned the charge, namely, that on or about July 15, 1959 at Circular Garden Reach Road, Amin Khan acquired possession of these gold bars knowingly and with intent to evade the prohibition in force at the time. The specific charge thus against Amin Khan was that he acquired possession of these gold bars on July 15, 1959 outside gate No. 5 of the Kidderpore dock. The suggestion of the prosecution was that the gold bars had been smuggled out of S. S. Sangola on that morning and handed over to Amin Khan who thus acquired possession of them that morning knowingly and with intent to avoid the prohibition or restriction in force. The High Court has found that there was no evidence to show that anybody actually came out of the dock area and handed over the gold bars either to Amin Khan or put them in the taxi to the knowledge of Amin Khan. Samsul Huq who was watching at the time was unable to say if any one had put the attache case containing the gold bars in the taxi, for, according to him, there was a crowd at that place and time and he could not keep the taxi in full view all the time. The High Court therefore took the view that it could not be ruled out that Amin Khan might have been in possession of the gold bars from before the taxi reached the Kidderpore dock. If that was so, it could not be said that Amin Khan had acquired possession of the gold bars outside Kidderpore dock that morning

at 7-10 a.m. knowingly or with intent to avoid a prohibition or restriction. The High Court further observed that the presence of Amin Khan near the dock area with a large quantity of gold was very suspicious; but in view of the nature of the evidence that the customs officers were on watch from before and did not see Amin Khan going into the dock area or did not see any one else dropping the attache case into the taxi, it could not be held that Amin Khan had acquired possession of the gold bars that morning at that place. That being so, the High Court was of the view that Amin Khan must be given the benefit of doubt in respect of the charge framed against him and consequently acquitted him.

33. This is an appeal under Art. 136 of the Constitution and we cannot say in the circumstances that the view taken by the High Court is necessarily incorrect, keeping in mind the charge that was framed against Amin Khan. In view of our decision in Sachidananda Benerji v. Sita Ram Agarwala, Cri. Appeal No. 192 of 1961 (the judgment in which is being delivered today), the matter would have been different if the charge against Amin Khan was not of acquiring possession of prohibited goods that morning at that place but merely of carrying, keeping or concealing such goods. Unfortunately that was not the charge against Amin Khan. The charge was that he had acquired the prohibited goods that morning at that place. That being the nature of the charge against Amin Khan, it cannot be said that the High Court was in error in holding that in the absence of sufficient evidence to show that Amin Khan had gone into the dock area and had come out from there with the attache case or somebody else had come out of the dock area and had dropped the attache case in the taxi to the knowledge of Amin Khan, the charge had not been proved beyond reasonable doubt. We emphasise again that Amin Khan gets away only because of the specific charge framed against him and the matter might have been different if the charge had been, for example, for keeping or concealing or carrying prohibited goods with the necessary knowledge and intent. In this view of the matter, the appeal fails and is hereby dismissed.

In Cri. As. Nos. 41 and 42 of 1964

34. **WANCHOO, J.:**

These two appeals by special leave from the judgment of the High Court of Bombay raise a common question of law and will be dealt with together. The question which arises in these cases relates to the interpretation of S. 167(81) of the Sea Customs Act (No. 8 of 1878). We do not think it necessary to refer to the facts of these cases because the High Court did not hear the respondents on other grounds of appeal except one relating to the intent necessary under S. 167(81) The High Court took the view following the decision of the Calcutta High Court in the case of Sita Ram Agarwala v. State, AIR 1962 Cal 370 (which has been dealt with by us in Cri Appeal No. 192 of 1961, in which judgment is being delivered today) that the intent necessary for conviction under S. 167(81) could only apply to a person who was in any manner concerned in the actual smuggling or importation of the goods and could not apply to persons who dealt with smuggled goods after the smuggling was over. Following this view the High Court held that the intent necessary for a

conviction under S. 167(81) of the Act could not be attributed to a person who acquires possession of smuggled goods or deals with them long after the smuggling was over and who was not the smuggler himself or was not concerned in the smuggling in any manner. The High Court further held that it was only the person who was concerned in the transaction of smuggling in any manner who would either have the intent to defraud the government of the duty payable or have the intent to evade any prohibition or restriction imposed on importation. As it was not shown in these cases that the two respondents were smugglers or were in any way concerned with the actual smuggling, the High Court ordered their acquittal and did not go into other points urged on behalf of the respondents against the judgment of the Presidency Magistrate by which they had been convicted under S. 167(81) of the Act. We have held in Sita Ram Agarwala's case, Cri. Appeal No.192 of 1961 that S.167(81) applies not only to a person who might be concerned in smuggling but also to a person who deals with smuggled goods after the smuggling is over and that such a person also has the intent to avoid the prohibition or restriction or defraud the government of the duty payable thereon provided he has the knowledge that the goods were smuggled. In this view of the matter the basis on which the High Court acquitted the respondents falls. We therefore allow the appeals, set aside the order of the High Court and remand the cases to the High Court for dealing with the other points raised on behalf of the respondents against their conviction in accordance with law and in the light of this judgment.

Order accordingly.