

State of Rajasthan

Vs

Sanjay Kumar and Others

Criminal Appeal No. 532 of 1998

(M. K. Mukherjee, S. M. Quadri JJ)

01.05.1998

JUDGMENT

S. S. M. QUADRI, J. –

1. Special leave is granted.
2. The State of Rajasthan has assailed the validity of the judgment and order of the High Court of Rajasthan in SB Criminal Miscellaneous Petition No. 293 of 1996 dated 11-4-1996.
3. On 29-2-1988, the Senior Drugs Inspector (IB), collected samples of (i) Tenokap Suspension B. No. 303 and (ii) Tab. Oxyphenbutabne I.P.B. No. 1114 from M/s. Jayshree Medical Centre, Baroda (Gujarat), meant for public sale. He sent those samples for chemical analysis to Government Analyst, Food and Drugs Laboratory, Baroda on 2-3-1988. In his report of 2-7-1988, the Government Analyst opined that those drugs were not of standard quality. After due enquiry and investigation the Drug Controller ordered prosecution of the respondents on 3-2-1990 and accordingly the Drugs Inspector (IB), Directorate, Medical and Health Services, Rajasthan, Jaipur, filed complaint under Section 18-A read with Sections 16, 17 and 17-A punishable under Sections 27(d) and 27(b) (i) of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, on 28-6-1991. On the same day, the learned Additional Civil Judge & C.J.M., Court No. 6, Jaipur City, Jaipur took cognizance on the said complaint as Criminal Case No. 247 of 1991 and issued summons to all the respondents. That order of the learned Magistrate was questioned by the respondents before the High Court in SB Criminal Miscellaneous Petition No. 293 of 1996, on the ground that the complaint was barred by limitation under Section 468(2) (c) CrPC. By order of 11-4-1996, the learned Single Judge of the High Court who dealt with that petition accepted that contention and quashed the proceeding in the said criminal case initiated by the learned Magistrate on 28-6-1991.
4. Shri Aruneshwar Gupta, the learned counsel appearing for the State, contends that the High Court was in error in computing the period of limitation from the date of collecting samples instead of from the date of the report dated 2-7-1988 of the Government Analyst. Learned counsel for the respondents while supporting the order of the High Court argued that the date when the samples were collected was the date of the offence so it was rightly taken as the starting point of limitation and from that date the complaint was clearly barred by limitation.
5. The only question that arises for consideration is : whether the complaint in question is barred by limitation under Section 468 CrPC.
6. In the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, Chapter XXXVI has been added prescribing limitation

for taking cognizance of certain offences with a view to expedite the process of detection and investigation of crimes and also to ensure observance of the principle of fairness in the trial of the offences by barring belated prosecution. Delay in prosecution of offences causes undue hardship as it keeps the sword hanging on the heads of accused persons and it also results in the material evidence getting vanished. This chapter applies to all such offences for which punishment prescribed is less than three years. But it does not apply to offences for which punishment prescribed is more than three years and to economic offences under various Acts, which are excluded under Central Act 12 of 1974 or any State Acts. It contains seven sections (467-473). Section 467 defines the expression "period of limitation" used in the chapter. Section 468 creates bar to taking cognizance of offences after lapse of period of limitation. Sections 469 to 473 deal with various aspects of computation of limitation. Of the aforementioned provisions, we are concerned with Sections 468 and 469. Sub-section (1) of Section 468 ordains that no court shall take cognizance of an offence of the category specified in sub-section (2), after the expiry of the "period of limitation" prescribed thereunder. This, however, is subject to the other provisions of the Code. Sub-section (2) postulates different period of limitation for offences with reference to the punishment provided for them; if the punishment provided for an offence in any Act is only fine, the period of limitation fixed is six months; if the offence is punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year, the period of limitation prescribed is one year and if the offence is punishable with imprisonment for a term exceeding one year but not exceeding three years, the period of limitation laid down is three years. And sub-section (3) spells out the rule of limitation in cases of joinder of charges; if a person is tried for more offences than one, then the period of limitation will be determined with reference to the offence which is punishable with the more severe punishment or, as the case may be, the most severe punishment; for example, if a person is tried for various offences and some of them are punishable with fine and some with imprisonment for a term less than a year and some for which the punishment is provided up to three years, then the period of limitation for all the offences, if they are tried together, will be three years.

7. Section 469 deals with commencement of the period of limitation and it reads thus :

"469. Commencement of the period of limitation . - (1) The period of limitation, in relation to an offender, shall commence, -

(a) on the date of the offence; or

(b) where the commission of the offence was not known to the person aggrieved by the offence or to any police officer, the first day on which such offence comes to the knowledge of such person or to any police officer, whichever is earlier; or

(c) where it is not known by whom the offence was committed, the first day on which the identity of the offender is known to the person aggrieved by the offence or to the police officer making investigation into the offence, whichever is earlier."

A plain reading of the provision extracted above shows that in sub-section (1) three alternative starting points of limitation have been specified - (a) the date of the offence; (b) the first day on which an offence came to the knowledge of the person aggrieved by the offence or to any police officer, whichever is earlier, in a case where the commission of the offence was not known to any of them, or (c) the first day on which the identity of the offender is known to the person aggrieved by the offence or to the police officer making investigation, into the offence, whichever is earlier, but this can be called in aid in a case where it is not known by whom the offence was committed.

Basically from the date of the offence the period of limitation will start but there will be cases where the commission of offence or identity of the offender comes to the knowledge of those concerned with it long thereafter so in such situations clauses (b) and (c), as the case may be, would be the date of commencement of period of limitation.

8. Now we shall see which clause of sub-section (1) of Section 469 is attracted to the facts of the case. For this purpose it will be necessary to revert to the facts of this case. The essence of the offences charged is manufacture of adulterated, sub-standard, misbranded, spurious drugs within the meaning of the relevant provisions of the Act and/or storage, distribution and sale of such drugs in contravention of the provisions of the Act. On the date of collection of samples from Respondent 16, on 29-2-1988, it could not have been said that any offence was committed as selling of drugs per se is no offence and the quality of the drugs was not known to the Drugs Inspector, the complainant on that date. It is only when the report of the Government Analyst was received, that it came to light that the provisions of the Act are violated and offence is committed. So on the facts of this case it cannot be said that clause (a) of Section 469(1) is attracted. That the drugs which were offered for sale were sub-standard/adulterated within the meaning of the Act, came to the knowledge of the Drugs Inspector only on 2-7-1988 when the report of the Government Analyst was received by him; and therefore, clause (b) of Section 469(1) will be attracted.

9. Under cognate legislations of different States, similar questions arose before the High Courts. In *R. S. Arora v. State* (1987 Cri LJ 1215 : (1987) 1 FAC 283 (Del)) the question which fell for consideration of the Delhi High Court was whether for prosecution under Sections 7, 19 and 16(1) of the Seeds Act, 1966, the period of limitation of six months would start from the date of collection of samples under clause (a) or from the date of Seed Analyst's report for purposes of clause (b) of Section 469(1) CrPC. The learned Single Judge of the Delhi High Court took the view that the limitation commences from the date of submission of the report by the Seed Analyst to the Inspector, so Section 469(1) (b) would apply. The same view was taken by the Bombay High Court in *Omprakash Gulabchandji Partani v. Ashok*. (1992 Cri LJ 2704 (Bom)).

10. In *Satyanarayana General Traders v. State* ((1993) 2 Crimes 203 (AP)) a learned Single Judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court held that for prosecution of offences of misbranding under the Insecticides Act, 1968 the period of limitation would start from the date on which the report of the analyst was received but not from the date of taking samples and thus Section 469(1) (b) would be attracted.

11. We are in entire agreement with the views expressed by the learned Judges of the High Courts in the above cases.

12. For the above reasons, in the instant case, the limitation for the purpose of Section 468(2) (c) will commence from 2-7-1988, the date of knowledge of the commission of offence to the officer concerned under Section 469(1) (b) but not from 29-2-1988 (the date of collection of samples by the Drugs Inspector) and as the complaint was filed on 28-6-1991 which is within three years so the complaint is not barred by limitation under Section 468(2) (c). The High Court has missed this germane aspect and erroneously taken the date of commencement of the limitation as 29-2-1988, the date on which the samples were collected by the Drugs Inspector from Accused 16. It is thus clear that the High Court has committed illegality in so computing the period of limitation, which results in miscarriage of justice.

13. In the result, we set aside the impugned order of the learned Single Judge of the High Court

dated 11-4-1996, allow the appeal and remand the case to the learned Additional Civil Judge and Chief Judicial Magistrate, Court No. 6, Jaipur City, Jaipur, for disposal in accordance with law.