

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

State of Madhya Pradesh

Vs.

Pappu @ Ajay

(Dr. Arijit Pasayat and Dr. Mukundakam Sharma JJ.)

04.08.2008

JUDGMENT

Dr. Arijit Pasayat, J.

1. Leave granted.
2. Since the only question involved in this appeal is whether learned Single Judge was justified in reducing the sentence, as imposed by the High Court on the respondent, detailed reference to the factual aspects is unnecessary.
3. The respondent faced trial for offences punishable under Sections 376(1) read with Section 511 of the *Indian Penal Code, 1860* (in short 'the IPC') and Sections 324 and 452 IPC. For the first offence, he was sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment for four years with a fine of Rs.2,000/- with default stipulations. For the second offence, he was sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment for one year with a fine of Rs.500/- with default stipulations. Similarly, for the last offence, he was sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment for one year and to pay a fine of Rs.500/- with default stipulations.
4. He preferred an appeal before the High Court and the High Court, by the impugned order, held that since the respondent had undergone imprisonment for about five months and 25 days, the sentence should be reduced to the period already undergone in respect of the first offence.
5. The State of Madhya Pradesh has questioned correctness of the judgment on the ground that considering the gravity of the offence involved, the High Court ought not to have reduced the sentence to the period undergone which, as noted above, was less than six months.
6. Learned counsel for the respondent supported the judgment of the High Court.
7. In the instant case the victim was examined as PW-3. It is to be noted that three persons faced trial and the co-accused persons were acquitted of the charges.

8. As rightly submitted by learned counsel for the appellant - State, no reason has been indicated by the High Court to direct reduction of sentence.

9. The law regulates social interests, arbitrates conflicting claims and demands. Security of persons and property of the people is an essential function of the State. It could be achieved through instrumentality of criminal law. Undoubtedly, there is a cross cultural conflict where living law must find answer to the new challenges and the courts are required to mould the sentencing system to meet the challenges. The contagion of lawlessness would undermine social order and lay it in ruins. Protection of society and stamping out criminal proclivity must be the object of law which must be achieved by imposing appropriate sentence.

“Therefore, law as a corner-stone of the edifice of "order" should meet the challenges confronting the society. Friedman in his "Law in Changing Society" stated that, "State of criminal law continues to be as it should be a decisive reflection of social consciousness of society". Therefore, in operating the sentencing system, law should adopt the corrective machinery or the deterrence based on factual matrix. By deft modulation sentencing process be stern where it should be, and tempered with mercy where it warrants to be. The facts and given circumstances in each case, the nature of the crime, the manner in which it was planned and committed, the motive for commission of the crime, the conduct of the accused, the nature of weapons used and all other attending circumstances are relevant facts which would enter into the area of consideration.”

10. Therefore, undue sympathy to impose inadequate sentence would do more harm to the justice system to undermine the public confidence in the efficacy of law and society could not long endure under such serious threats. It is, therefore, the duty of every court to award proper sentence having regard to the nature of the offence and the manner in which it was executed or committed etc. This position was illuminatingly stated by this Court in *Sevaka Perumal etc. v. State of Tamil Nadu*¹.

11. The criminal law adheres in general to the principle of proportionality in prescribing liability according to the culpability of each kind of criminal conduct. It ordinarily allows some significant discretion to the Judge in arriving at a sentence in each case, presumably to permit sentences that reflect more subtle considerations of culpability that are raised by the special facts of each case. Judges in essence affirm that punishment ought always to fit the crime; yet in practice sentences are determined largely by other considerations. Sometimes it is the correctional needs of the perpetrator that are offered to justify a sentence. Sometimes the desirability of keeping him out of circulation, and sometimes even the tragic results of his crime. Inevitably these considerations cause a departure from just desert as the basis of punishment and create cases of apparent injustice that are serious and widespread.

12. After giving due consideration to the facts and circumstances of each case, for deciding just and appropriate sentence to be awarded for an offence, the aggravating and mitigating factors and circumstances in which a crime has been committed are to be delicately balanced on the basis of really relevant circumstances in a dispassionate manner by the Court. Such act

of balancing is indeed a difficult task. It has been very aptly indicated in *Dennis Councle MCGDautha v. State of Callifornia*²: that no formula of a foolproof nature is possible that would provide a reasonable criterion in determining a just and appropriate punishment in the infinite variety of circumstances that may affect the gravity of the crime. In the absence of any foolproof formula which may provide any basis for reasonable criteria to correctly assess various circumstances germane to the consideration of gravity of crime, the discretionary judgment in the facts of each case, is the only way in which such judgment may be equitably distinguished.

13. Imposition of sentence without considering its effect on the social order in many cases may be in reality a futile exercise. The social impact of the crime, e.g. where it relates to offences against women, dacoity, kidnapping, misappropriation of public money, treason and other offences involving moral turpitude or moral delinquency which have great impact on social order, and public interest, cannot be lost sight of and per se require exemplary treatment. Any liberal attitude by imposing meager sentences or taking too sympathetic view merely on account of lapse of time in respect of such offences will be result-wise counter productive in the long run and against societal interest which needs to be cared for and strengthened by string of deterrence inbuilt in the sentencing system.

14. The Court will be failing in its duty if appropriate punishment is not awarded for a crime which has been committed not only against the individual victim but also against the society to which the criminal and victim belong. The punishment to be awarded for a crime must not be irrelevant but it should conform to and be consistent with the atrocity and brutality with which the crime has been perpetrated, the enormity of the crime warranting public abhorrence and it should "respond to the society's cry for justice against the criminal". If for extremely heinous crime of murder perpetrated in a very brutal manner without any provocation, most deterrent punishment is not given, the case of deterrent punishment will lose its relevance.

15. These aspects have been elaborated in *State of M.P. v. Ghanshyam Singh*³, and *State of M.P. v. Babbu Barkare alias Dalap Singh*⁴.

16. Considering the legal position as indicated above the High Court's order is clearly unsustainable and is accordingly set aside. The judgment of the Trial Court is restored. The respondent shall surrender to custody forthwith to serve the remainder of sentence.

17. The appeal is allowed.

¹(AIR 1991 SC 1463)

²402 US 183: 28 L.D. 2d 711

³(2003(8) SCC 13)

⁴(2005 (5) SCC 413)