

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Vinay Kumar Rai

Vs.

The State of Bihar

Crl.A.No.371 of 2006

(Dr. Arijit Pasayat and P. Sathasivam JJ.)

18.08.2008

JUDGMENT

Dr.Arijit Pasayat, J.

1. Challenge in these appeals is to the judgment of a Division Bench of the Patna High Court upholding the conviction of the appellants for offence punishable under Section 302 read with Section 34 of the *Indian Penal Code, 1860* (in short `IPC') so far as accused Ajeet Kumar Rai @ Ajeet Narayan Rai and Vinay Kumar Rai, appellant No.1 in Criminal appeal 371 of 2006 and Ashutosh Kumar Rai @ Sanjay Kumar Rai, appellant in other Criminal Appeal. Ashutosh Kumar Rai was further charged for committing the murder of Nanda Kumar Singh punishable under Section 302 IPC and Section 27 of the *Arms Act, 1959* (in short `Arms Act'). The High Court dismissed the appeals. The present appeals had been filed by Vinay Kumar Rai (A-3) and Ajeet Kumar Rai @ Ajeet Narayan Rai (A-1) and Ashutosh Kumar Rai (A-2). The Presiding Officer, Additional Court No.1, Fast Track Court in Sessions Trial Nos. 578/96 and 1/2001 held Ajeet Kumar Rai and Vinay Kumar Rai guilty under Section 302 read with Section 34 IPC and accused Ashutosh Kumar Rai under Section 302 IPC and sentenced to undergo RI for life. He was also found guilty of offence under Section 27 of the Arms Act and sentenced to undergo RI for three years. Two appeals were filed before the High Court which by the impugned judgment dismissed the same. All accused were put on trial for committing the murder of Nanda Kumar Singh (hereinafter referred to as the `deceased') in furtherance of their common intention for offence punishable under Section 302 read with Section 34 IPC.

2. Prosecution version in a nutshell is as follows:

“According to the first information report given by Vishwanath Singh (PW-7) before the police on 26.7.1996 at 1.10 p.m., at about 12 noon, while he was sitting on the verandah of the house and his son Nand Kumar Singh, the deceased had gone to the field to inquire as to whether the land has been ploughed or not, he did not find tractor there and while he was returning he saw the appellants and started shouting. Hearing the alarm, the informant along with Sachida Nand Singh (PW-4) rushed there and

found that appellants Vinay Kumar Rai and Ajeet Kumar Rai alias Ajeet Narayan Rai had caught hold of his son and appellant Ashutosh Kumar Rai @ Sanjay Kumar Rai had put pistol on his right temple. The moment they saw him and Sachida Nand Singh, appellant Vinay Kumar and Ajeet Kumar Rai @ Ajeet Narayan Rai exhorted to fire at which appellant Ashutosh Kumar Rai alias Sanjay Kumar Rai fired at his son on the temple. Sustaining the injuries his son fell down and all the appellants fled away brandishing the pistol. When the informant and his nephew Sachidanand Singh reached there, they found injury above the temple and immediately put him on a rickshaw and brought to the Government Hospital, Sasaram where the doctor declared him brought dead. On the basis of the aforesaid information, Sasaram (M) P.S. Case No.386 of 1996 was registered under Section 302/34 of IPC and 27 of the Arms Act.

According to the first information report, the motive for the occurrence is the pendency of litigation before the Director of Consolidation.

The police, after investigation, submitted charge sheet against the appellants and they were ultimately committed to the court of Sessions where all the appellants were charged for offence under section 302/34 of IPC whereas, appellant Ashutosh Kumar Rai alias Sanjay Kumar Rai was further charged for offence under section 302 of IPC and section 27 of the Arms Act.

The appellants denied to have committed any offence and pleaded false implication on account of previous enmity and their further defence was that the deceased was killed on the same day at about 12 noon by fire arm by some unknown persons near the house of Ram Nagina Singh.

Prosecution in order to substantiate the accusations examined nine witnesses out of which Sachidanand (PW-4), Sunil Kumar Singh (PW-5), Srikant Singh (PW-6) and Vishwa Nath Singh (PW-7) claimed to be eye-witnesses. The last named person was the informant. In order to prove their innocence, the accused persons examined four witnesses. The trial Court believed the evidence of the eye-witnesses and found the accused guilty.”

3. In appeal, it was submitted that there was discrepancy between the medical evidence and the oral evidence and, therefore, the prosecution version should not have been accepted. The primary stands were regarding the alleged discrepancy between the medical evidence and the ocular evidence and the eye-witnesses being related to the deceased. The High Court did not find any substance in any of these stands and dismissed the appeals.

4. The stands taken before the High Court were reiterated in these appeals. It was highlighted by learned counsel for the appellants that it is unusual that eye witnesses who are closely related to the deceased did not try to intervene to save the deceased from the assailants.

5. Learned counsel for the State on the other hand with reference to the conclusions of the High Court pointed out that the witnesses have said that they saw the incidence from a

distance of about 15 to 20 yards. They stated that the deceased was shot dead even before they reached the place of occurrence. Therefore, there was no question of intervening to save the life of the deceased.

6. Merely because the eye-witnesses are family members their evidence cannot per se be discarded. When there is allegation of interestedness, the same has to be established. Mere statement that being relatives of the deceased they are likely to falsely implicate the accused cannot be a ground to discard the evidence which is otherwise cogent and credible. We shall also deal with the contention regarding interestedness of the witnesses for furthering prosecution version. Relationship is not a factor to affect credibility of a witness. It is more often than not that a relation would not conceal actual culprit and make allegations against an innocent person. Foundation has to be laid if plea of false implication is made. In such cases, the court has to adopt a careful approach and analyse evidence to find out whether it is cogent and credible.

7. In *Dalip Singh and Ors. v. The State of Punjab*¹ it has been laid down as under:-

"A witness is normally to be considered independent unless he or she springs from sources which are likely to be tainted and that usually means unless the witness has cause, such as enmity against the accused, to wish to implicate him falsely. Ordinarily a close relation would be the last to screen the real culprit and falsely implicate an innocent person. It is true, when feelings run high and there is personal cause for enmity, that there is a tendency to drag in an innocent person against whom a witness has a grudge along with the guilty, but foundation must be laid for such a criticism and the mere fact of relationship far from being a foundation is often a sure guarantee of truth. However, we are not attempting any sweeping generalization. Each case must be judged on its own facts. Our observations are only made to combat what is so often put forward in cases before us as a general rule of prudence. There is no such general rule. Each case must be limited to and be governed by its own facts."

8. The above decision has been followed in *Guli Chand and Ors. v. State of Rajasthan*² in which *Vadivelu Thevar v. State of Madras*³ was also relied upon.

9. We may also observe that the ground that the witness being a close relative and consequently being a partisan witness, should not be relied upon, has no substance. This theory was repelled by this Court as early as in *Dalip Singh's* case (supra) in which surprise was expressed over the impression which prevailed in the minds of the Members of the Bar that relatives were not independent witnesses. Speaking through Vivian Bose, J. it was observed:

"We are unable to agree with the learned Judges of the High Court that the testimony of the two eyewitnesses requires corroboration. If the foundation for such an observation is based on the fact that the witnesses are women and that the fate of seven men hangs on their testimony, we know of no such rule. If it is grounded on the reason that they are closely related to the deceased we are unable to concur. This is a

fallacy common to many criminal cases and one which another Bench of this Court endeavoured to dispel in - *Rameshwar v. State of Rajasthan*⁴. We find, however, that it unfortunately still persists, if not in the judgments of the Courts, at any rate in the arguments of counsel."

10. Again in *Masalti and Ors. v. State of U.P.*⁵ this Court observed: (p. 209-210 para 14):

"But it would, we think, be unreasonable to contend that evidence given by witnesses should be discarded only on the ground that it is evidence of partisan or interested witnesses.....The mechanical rejection of such evidence on the sole ground that it is partisan would invariably lead to failure of justice. No hard and fast rule can be laid down as to how much evidence should be appreciated. Judicial approach has to be cautious in dealing with such evidence; but the plea that such evidence should be rejected because it is partisan cannot be accepted as correct."

11. To the same effect is the decisions in *State of Punjab v. Jagir Singh*⁶, *Lehna v. State of Haryana*⁷ and *Gangadhar Behera and Ors. v. State of Orissa*⁸.

12. The above position was also highlighted in *Babulal Bhagwan Khandare and Anr. v. State of Maharashtra*⁹ and in *Salim Sahab v. State of M.P.*¹⁰.

13. The over insistence on witnesses having no relation with the victims often results in criminal justice going away. When any incident happens in a dwelling house the most natural witnesses would be the inmates of that house. It is unpragmatic to ignore such natural witnesses and insist on outsiders who would not have even seen any thing. If the Court has discerned from the evidence or even from the investigation records that some other independent person has witnessed any event connecting the incident in question then there is justification for making adverse comments against non- examination of such person as prosecution witness. Otherwise, merely on surmises the Court should not castigate a prosecution for not examining other persons of the locality as prosecution witnesses. Prosecution can be expected to examine only those who have witnessed the events and not those who have not seen it though the neighborhood may be replete with other residents also. [See: *State of Rajasthan v. Teja Ram and Ors.*¹¹].

14. It is to be noted that PWs 4 and 7 have stated in their evidence about the presence of PWs 5 and 6. Interestingly, Raj Kumar Singh (PW-1) in his statement also stated about their presence at the place of occurrence. Though it was pleaded by learned counsel for the appellants that PW-1's evidence cast a doubt about the prosecution version it is to be noted that PW-1 never claimed to be an eye witness. The evidence of PWs and eye witnesses clearly established that accused Ajeet Kumar Rai and Vinay Kumar Rai caught hold of deceased and on their exhortation appellant Ashutosh shot at the deceased. Therefore, Section 34 has application.

15. Coming to the alleged discrepancy between the ocular evidence and the medical evidence as rightly noted by the High Court there was no discrepancy. The medical evidence was

clearly in line with what has been stated by eye-witnesses. The High Court has noted that the expression used by the witnesses cannot be analysed in hypothetical manner. According to the eye witnesses gunshot injury was caused on the right temple but the injury was found on the upper eyelid and everted wound on the right oricle margin. Therefore, it can never be said that medical evidence is contrary to the ocular evidence.

16. Looked at from any angle, the appeals are without merit and deserve dismissal which we direct.

¹(AIR 1953 SC 364)

²(1974 (3) SCC 698)

³(AIR 1957 SC 614)

⁴(AIR 1952 SC 54 at p.59)

⁵(AIR 1965 SC 202)

⁶(AIR 1973 SC 2407)

⁷(2002 (3) SCC 76)

⁸(2002 (8) SCC 381)

⁹[2005 (10) SCC 404]

¹⁰(2007 (1) SCC 699)

¹¹(AIR 1999 SC 1776)