

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

State of Kerala & Anr.

Vs.

C.P. Rao

CrI.A.No.1098 of 2006

(Asok Kumar Ganguly and Deepak Verma,JJ.,)

16.05.2011

JUDGMENT

Ashok Kumar Ganguly,J.,

1. Heard learned counsel for the parties.
2. This is an appeal against the judgment and order of acquittal dated 19th January, 2005 rendered by the High Court. The respondent facing a trial, was convicted under Sections 7 and 13(2) read with Section 13(1)(d) of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 by the Special Judge, Thiruvananthapuram, in Criminal Case No. 9 of 1996 and the respondent was sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment for 20 months and pay a fine of Rs. 2500/- under the former charge and rigorous imprisonment for two years and a fine of Rs. 2500/- under the second charge. Default stipulations were also there.
3. The facts relating to that case have been summed up in the judgment of the High Court and we are not repeating the same here once again.
4. In passing the order of acquittal, the High Court examined and analysed in detail the evidence of the case. The High Court found that the complainant CW 1 was not examined and the only explanation given was that he was not available in the country but no details were given as to where the complainant was. The defence of the respondent in this case has also been noted by the High Court in some detail.
5. The prosecution case is that the demand of illegal gratification of Rs. 5000/- was made by the respondent from CW 1 on 19.10.1994 for the purpose of giving pass marks to all the students who appeared in the practical examination of pharmaceutical-II in D-Pharma final examination in the year 1994. It is an admitted case that the respondent alone cannot give such marks. In view of the examination system prevailing such marks have to be approved by others. The respondent alone, therefore, is admittedly not in a position to allot higher marks. Apart from that, it is the case of the respondent that when CW 1 met him in a hotel room, the respondent shouted that some currency notes had been thrust into his pocket by

CW 1. Such shouts of the respondent were heard by PW 1 and PW 2. The evidence of PW 1 and PW 2 were recorded by the Trial Court. The evidence of PW 1 and PW 2 could not be, in any way, shaken by manner of cross- examination. PW 3 has also given evidence of the previous animosity between the college authorities and the respondent who had an occasion to file reports with the college authorities on the basis of some inspection.

6. In the background of these facts, especially the non- examination of CW 1, was found very crucial by the High Court.

7. The High Court has referred to the decision of this Court in *Panalal Damodar Rathi Vs. State of Maharashtra*¹ wherein a Three-Judge Bench of this Court held that when there was no corroboration of testimony of the complainant regarding the demand of bribe by the accused, it has to be accepted that the version of the complainant is not corroborated and, therefore, the evidence of the complainant cannot be relied on.

8. In the aforesaid circumstances, the Three-Judge Bench in *Pannalal Damodar Rathi case*(supra) held that there is grave suspicion about the appellant's complicity and the case has not been proved beyond reasonable doubt. (see para 11) This Court finds that the appreciation of the ratio in *Panalal Damodar Rathi case*(supra) by the High Court was correctly made in the facts and circumstances of the case.

9. Apart from that, Mr. P.P. Rao, learned counsel for the respondent has drawn attention of this Court to some other pronouncements of this Court on the relevant question.

10. In *C.M. Girish Babu Vs. CBI, Cochin, High Court of Kerala reported in*², this Court while dealing with the case under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988, by referring to its previous decision in the case of *Suraj Mal Vs. State (Delhi Admn.) reported in*³ held that mere recovery of tainted money, divorced from the circumstances under which it is paid, is not sufficient to convict the accused when the substantive evidence in the case is not reliable. The mere recovery by itself cannot prove the charge of the prosecution against the accused. In the absence of any evidence to prove payment of bribe or to show that the accused voluntarily accepted the money knowing it to be bribe conviction cannot be sustained. (See para 18) In a subsequent decision of this Court also under the Prevention of Corruption Act, in the case of *A. Subair Vs. State of Kerala*⁴ this Court made certain pertinent observations about the necessity of the presence of the complainant in a bribery case. The relevant observations have been made in paragraph 18 and 19 which are quoted below:-

18. The High Court held that since the Special Judge made attempts to secure the presence of the complainant and those attempts failed because he was not available in India, there was justification for non-examination of the complainant.

19. We find it difficult to countenance the approach of the High Court. In the absence of semblance of explanation by the investigating officer for the non-examination of the complainant, it was not open to the courts below to find out their own reason for not tendering the complainant in evidence. It has, therefore, to be held that the best evidence to

prove the demand was not made available before the court. Those observations quoted above are clearly applicable in this case. In the context of those observations, this Court in paragraph 28 of *A. Subair (supra)* made it clear that the prosecution has to prove the charge beyond reasonable doubt like any other criminal offence and the accused should be considered innocent till it is proved to the contrary by proper proof of demand and acceptance of illegal gratification, which is the vital ingredient to secure the conviction in a bribery case. In view of the aforesaid settled principles of law, we find it difficult to take a view different from the one taken by the High Court. In coming to its conclusion, we are reminded of the well settled principle that when the court has to exercise its discretion in an appeal arising against an order of acquittal, the Court must remember that the innocence of the accused is further re-established by the judgment of acquittal rendered by the High Court. Against such decision of the High Court, the scope of interference by this Court in order of acquittal has been very succinctly laid down by a Three-Judge bench of this Court in the case of *Sanwat Singh & others Vs. State of Rajasthan*⁵ At page 129, Justice Subba Rao (as His Lordship then was) culled out the principles as follows:-

"The foregoing discussion yields the following results: (1) an appellate court has full power to review the evidence upon which the order of acquittal is founded; (2) the principles laid down in *Sheo Swarup's case* 1934 L.R. 61 I.A. 398 afford a correct guide for the appellate court's approach to a case in disposing of such an appeal; and (3) the different phraseology used in the judgments of this Court, such as (i) "substantial and compelling reasons", (ii) "good and sufficiently cogent reasons", and (iii) "strong reasons" are not intended to curtail the undoubted power of an appellate court in an appeal against acquittal to review the entire evidence and to come to its own conclusion; but in doing so it should not only consider every matter on record having a bearing on the questions of fact and the reasons given by the court below in support of its order of acquittal in its arriving at a conclusion on those facts, but should also express those reasons in its judgment, which lead it to hold that the acquittal was not justified."

We are in respectful agreement with the aforesaid salutary principles settled by this Court and we are constrained to hold that this appeal has no merit and is accordingly dismissed.

¹(1979) 4 SCC 0526

²(2009) 3SCC 0779

³(1979) 4 SCC 0725

⁴(2009) 6 SCC 0587

⁵(1961) 3 SCR 0120