

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Vice Chancellor, Guru Ghasidas University

Vs.

Craig Mcleod

C.A.No.5889 of 2012

(A.K. Patnaik and Madan B. Lokur, JJ.)

16.08.2012

JUDGMENT

Madan B.Lokur, J.

1. Leave granted.

2. The Vice Chancellor, Guru Ghasidas University is aggrieved by an interim order dated 09.08.2010 passed by the High Court of Chhattisgarh at Bilaspur in W.P.(C) No. 694 of 2010 filed by Craig Mcleod.

3. The subject matter of the impugned interim order, is three directions given by the University on 02.02.2010. These three directions are:

“(1) Suspending Craig Mcleod from attending classes in the University of which he is a student,

(2) Stopping him from availing the facilities of the University till final orders are passed in respect of his alleged gross misbehavior, and

(3) Restraining from entering the University premises.”

4. All three directions were stayed by the High Court by the impugned interim order till the disposal of the Writ Petition. The interim stay was subject to the condition that Craig Mcleod gives an undertaking, inter alia, of good behaviour. The impugned interim order also directed the University not to pass a final order in respect of the alleged gross misbehaviour of Craig Mcleod.

5. In our opinion the impugned interim order is not sustainable and while passing final orders, we have taken subsequent developments into consideration.

The facts:

6. It is alleged that on 02.02.2010 Craig Mcleod grossly misbehaved on campus with two Professors of the University. As a result of the incident, a First Information Report was lodged with the police and the Proctorial Board of the University took an emergent decision to expel him from the University for violating the code of conduct and for beating and threatening a teacher. Pending a final decision on the allegations against him, Craig Mcleod was suspended from attending his classes, stopped from availing facilities of the University and restrained from entering the University premises by an order dated 02.02.2010.

Proceedings in the High Court:

7. Feeling aggrieved, Craig Mcleod challenged the said order by filing Writ Petition (C) No. 694 of 2010 in the High Court of Chhattisgarh. On 17.02.2010 notice was issued in the Writ Petition and in the interim, the passing of an order of rustication was stayed. This interim order was continued for a couple of months.

8. On 17.06.2010, the High Court granted liberty to the University to take a final decision in the matter of the alleged gross misbehaviour of Craig Mcleod within a week. In other words, the interim order was not extended.

9. Soon thereafter, some developments appear to have taken place but they are not clear from the record before us. Be that as it may, on 22.07.2010 the High Court recorded that Craig Mcleod had filed an affidavit dated 21.07.2010 in the High Court tendering an unconditional apology to the teacher concerned for the incident, which he stated was unintentional. The order passed by the High Court also recorded that Craig Mcleod stated that he would go to the University on 26.07.2010 and personally tender an apology to the concerned teachers. The case was then adjourned to 06.08.2010.

10. When the matter was taken up on 06.08.2010, the High Court was informed by the University and the concerned Professors that Craig Mcleod did come to the University to tender an apology but he was accompanied by several persons. It appears that an apology was not tendered by him and in any event the apology, if tendered, was not sincere in view of the above situation. This was, of course, contested by Craig Mcleod.

11. Based, however, on the affidavit of apology dated 21.07.2010, the impugned interim order dated 09.08.2010 came to be passed by the High Court. Proceedings in this Court and pendent lite developments:

12. Feeling aggrieved by the impugned interim order dated 09.08.2010 the University preferred a Petition for Special Leave to appeal (now a Civil Appeal). On 29.11.2010, this Court passed the following order:

“Issue Notice.

Interim stay of the impugned order of the High Court to the extent it stays the passing of the final order in the disciplinary enquiry against the respondent. Consequently, the Enquiry Authority may submit his report, subject to final decision.”

13. When we took up the matter for final disposal, learned counsel for the parties brought to our notice certain developments that had taken place during the pendency of this appeal. Firstly, on 07.01.2011 an office order was passed by the Vice Chancellor of the University rustivating Craig Mcleod from the University for a period of 5 years. It was also ordered that he was not entitled to get admission in any course in the University or any affiliated college of University during this period of 5 years. The operative portion of the order passed by the Vice Chancellor reads as follows:-

“The Shri Craig Mcleod S/o Shri Rodney Mcleod, a student of B.E. (Computer Science and Engineering) is hereby rustivated from the University for a period of 5 years w.e.f. today and further he will not be entitled to get admission in any course in the University or any affiliated college of the University during this period of 5 years.”

14. Thereafter, Craig Mcleod challenged the order dated 07.01.2011 by filing W.P.(C) No. 890 of 2012 in the High Court of Chhattisgarh. This Writ Petition came up for hearing on 10.05.2012 when it was withdrawn by him with liberty to move an appropriate application in this Court since this appeal was still pending. The order passed by the High Court on 10.05.2010 reads as follows:-

“In view of the order passed by the Hon’ble Supreme Court on 29/11/2010 in SLP(C) No. 32358/2010 arising out of an interim order passed by this court on 09/08/2010 in W.P. (C) No. 694/2010, wherein the Hon’ble Supreme Court directed that “the Enquiry Authority may submit his report, subject to final decision”, learned counsel for the petitioner seeks permission of the Court to withdraw the Writ Petition with liberty to move appropriate application before Hon’ble Supreme Court. Accordingly, the writ petition is dismissed as withdrawn with the liberty aforesaid.”

15. We may note that despite liberty having been granted to him, Craig Mcleod has not filed any application in this Court. We have, however, heard learned counsel for the parties.

Discussion:

16. It is only in an atypical case that this Court entertains a petition against a discretionary interim order passed by the High Court (*Southern Petrochemical Industries Corpn. Ltd. v. Madras Refineries Ltd*¹*Maharashtra SEB v. Vaman*²*and United Bank of India v. Satyawati Tondon*³*where, for example, the repercussions are grave or the legal basis for passing the interim order are obscure (Union of India v. Swadeshi Cotton Mills Co.Ltd*⁴*or there is a miscarriage of justice (Joginder Nath Gupta v. Satish Chander Gupta*⁵*or it is imperative that this Court exercises its corrective jurisdiction (Kishor Kirtilal Mehta and Ors. v. Lilavati Kirtilal Mehta Medical Trust*⁶.

17. There is, therefore, a self-imposed limited discretion for interference available to this Court, and it would, generally, be more appropriate for an aggrieved litigant to approach the High Court for rectifying any error that may have been committed in passing (or declining to pass) an interim order. Of course, in an emergent and appropriate situation it is always open to a litigant to approach this Court in its remedial jurisdiction.

18. Insofar as the present case is concerned, Craig Mcleod was alleged to have assaulted a professor on campus. This by itself is a rather serious allegation. While appreciating this, the High Court had, on 7.6.2010, permitted the University to take a final decision in respect of the alleged gross misbehaviour of Craig Mcleod. About two months later, the High Court completely changed its view apparently because in the meantime Craig Mcleod had tendered an apology to the High Court (which was not necessary) and then tendered or offered to tender an apology to the concerned Professor, which he did not accept since it was not sincere.

19. The turn of events, given the lapse of time, did not form a legal basis for interdicting completion of the inquiry against Craig Mcleod. While the High Court may have intended to bring a quietus to the entire episode, it should have kept in mind that maintenance of discipline in the University is equally important for a conducive academic environment and that the larger interests of the academic community are more central than the individual interests of a student. In *Varanaseya Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya and Another v. Rajkishore Tripathi*⁷(Dr it was observed that in matters of discipline or administration of the internal affairs of a University, the courts should be most reluctant to interfere.

20. It is under these circumstances that we have entertained this appeal against an interim order.

Conclusion:

21. Now, several significant developments have taken place overtaking the ‘cause of action’ for approaching this Court, particularly the passing of the office order dated 07.01.2011 by Vice Chancellor of the University. In our opinion, it is not necessary or even appropriate at this stage to judge the validity of the office order dated 07.01.2011. We may only mention that learned counsel for Craig Mcleod submitted that the order dated 07.01.2011 is in violation of the order passed by this Court on 29.11.2010.

22. Therefore, without going into the larger issues raised before us, we grant liberty to Craig Mcleod to revive W.P.(C) No. 890 of 2012 filed (and subsequently withdrawn) by him in the High Court challenging the office order dated 07.01.2011 passed by the Vice Chancellor of the University. We expect the High Court to permit revival of the Writ Petition and decide it expeditiously since it is stated that Craig Mcleod has already lost two years of his education as result of this litigation.

23. Under the circumstances, the impugned interim order is set aside and this appeal is accordingly disposed of.

Judgment Referred

1(1998) 9 SCC 0209

2(1999) 3 SCC 0132

3(2010) 8 SCC 0110

4(1978) 4 SCC 0295

5(1983) 2 SCC 0325

6(2007) 10 SCC 0021

7(1977) 1 SCC 0279