

# SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Chandralekha

Vs.

State of Rajasthan

Crl.A.No.2070 of 2012

(Aftab Alam and Ranjana Prakash Desai JJ.)

14.12.2012

## ORDER

1. Leave granted.

2. This appeal, by special leave, challenges order dated 14/9/2011 passed by the Rajasthan High Court dismissing the petition filed by one Rajeev Bhandari and appellants 1, 2 and 3 herein (original petitioners 2, 3 and 4 in the Special Leave Petition No.9092 of 2011) under Section 482 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 praying for quashing of FIR lodged by respondent 2 against them under Sections 498A and 406 of the Indian Penal Code.

2. Rajeev Bhandari is the husband of respondent 2. Appellant 1 is the mother-in-law and appellants 2 and 3 are the sisters-in-law of respondent 2.

3. In the special leave petition, Rajeev Bhandari was arraigned as petitioner 1. However, on 9/12/2011, this court dismissed the special leave petition insofar as Rajeev Bhandari is concerned. Therefore, today, the challenge to the impugned order can be said to be raised only by appellants 1, 2 and 3.

4. It is necessary to give a gist of the facts. On 1/4/2009, respondent 2 lodged the FIR in question at Thana Mahila, District Jodhpur against Rajeev Bhandari, his father Meghraj Bhandari and appellants 1, 2 and 3 alleging offences under Sections 498A and 406 of the IPC. In the FIR, she stated that she got married to Rajeev Bhandari on 9/7/2002 at Jodhpur; her father gave cash of Rs.1,25,000/- and gold and silver ornaments, other articles, clothes, household utensils, etc. to her

husband's family; she resided at Ahmedabad with her husband after her marriage; her husband behaved well for about two and half months; after that, the behaviour of Rajeev Bhandari, his father and the appellants 1, 2 and 3 changed; they started harassing her because she had brought less dowry; they did not give her sufficient food to eat; in her absence, appellants 1, 2 and 3 used to scatter her clothes and belongings and they demanded cash of Rs.6 lakhs. It is further stated in the complaint that on 26/1/2003, all of them harassed her and asked her to bring Rs.6 lakhs and gold and silver items from her father and threatened her that if she does not bring them, she will suffer. According to her, she suffered mental shock because of this behaviour and, hence, she left the matrimonial home in the morning of 27/1/2003. Then, her husband Rajeev Bhandari came searching for her and assured that there will be no demand of dowry. Due to this assurance, she again went to the matrimonial home. However, there was no difference in the behaviour of Rajeev Bhandari and appellants 1, 2 and 3. The dowry demand persisted. She, therefore, phoned her father and told him to come to Ahmedabad. On 14/2/2003, her father came to Ahmedabad and took her to Jodhpur on 15/2/2003. Since then, she has been staying with her parents. According to her, her husband Rajeev Bhandari and appellants 1, 2 and 3 have not contacted her thereafter. She contacted them and asked them to return her original degree certificate, silver and gold ornaments and other articles. But, they ignored her request. She, therefore, requested the police to take legal action against her husband Rajeev Bhandari, her father-in-law Meghraj Bhandari and appellants 1, 2 and 3. It must be stated here that during the pendency of the proceedings, Meghraj Bhandari died.

5. Before the Rajasthan High Court, it was submitted that a perusal of the FIR shows that respondent 2 had left her matrimonial home in the year 2003 and was residing in Jodhpur. No offence can be said to have been committed by the appellants in the territorial jurisdiction of Jodhpur. Hence, registration of FIR at Mahila Thana, Jodhpur is illegal. It was also urged that there is delay in lodging the FIR. On these grounds, it was prayed that the FIR be quashed. The Rajasthan High Court was of the view that part of cause of action had accrued at Jodhpur. It was held that since the offence is a continuous offence, FIR cannot be quashed on the ground of jurisdiction. The High Court also refused to quash the FIR on the ground of delay.

6. Before we refer to the submissions of learned counsel for the appellants, we must note that office report dated 16/8/2012 indicates that respondent 2 has been served. However, she has not engaged any counsel. We, therefore, requested Ms.

Asha Nair to assist us on her behalf as amicus curiae. Ms. Nair has accordingly assisted us.

7. Learned counsel for the appellants submitted that respondent 2 left the matrimonial home on 15/2/2003 and the FIR was filed on 1/4/2009 after six years. Counsel submitted that the allegations made in the FIR are of general nature and extremely vague. The FIR, therefore, deserves to be quashed. Ms. Nair, on the other hand, has supported the order of the High Court.

8. We must, at the outset, state that the High Court's view on jurisdiction meets with our approval and we confirm the view. However, after a careful perusal of the FIR and after taking into consideration the attendant circumstances, we are of the opinion that the FIR lodged by respondent 2 insofar as it relates to appellants 1, 2 and 3 deserves to be quashed. The allegations are extremely general in nature. No specific role is attributed to each of the appellants. Respondent 2 has stated that after the marriage, she resided with her husband at Ahmedabad. It is not clear whether appellants 1, 2 and 3 were residing with them at Ahmedabad. The marriage took place on 9/7/2002 and respondent 2 left her matrimonial home on 15/2/2003 i.e. within a period of seven months. Thereafter, respondent 2 took no steps to file any complaint against the appellants. Six years after she left the house, the present FIR is lodged making extremely vague and general allegations against appellants 1, 2 and 3. It is important to remember that appellant 2 is a married sister-in-law. In our opinion, such extra ordinary delay in lodging the FIR raises grave doubt about the truthfulness of allegations made by respondent 2 against appellants 1, 2 and 3, which are, in any case, general in nature. We have no doubt that by making such reckless and vague allegations, respondent 2 has tried to rope them in this case along with her husband. We are of the confirmed opinion that continuation of the criminal proceedings against appellants 1, 2 and 3 pursuant to this FIR is an abuse of process of law. In the interest of justice, therefore, the FIR deserves to be quashed insofar as it relates to appellants 1, 2 and 3.

9. Hence, impugned judgment and order dated 14/9/2011 passed by the Rajasthan High Court in S.B. Criminal Misc. Petition No.1935 of 2009 is quashed and set aside insofar as it refuses to quash the FIR in question against appellants 1, 2 and 3. FIR No.66 of 2009 lodged at Mahila Thana, District Jodhpur, Rajasthan is quashed insofar as it relates to appellants 1, 2 and 3 viz. Smt. Chandralekha, Vandana and Vinita respectively. We make it clear that so far as Rajeev Bhandari s/o. Meghraj Bhandari is concerned, the proceedings shall go on in accordance with law. We have not quashed FIR No.66 of 2009 insofar as it relates to Rajeev

Bhandari. Needless to say that the court seized of the complaint shall deal with Rajeev Bhandari's case independently, without being influenced by anything said by us on the merits of the case and in accordance with law.

10. The appeal is disposed of in the aforestated terms.