

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION

CRIMINAL APPEAL No.2049-2066 of 2012  
(Arising out of SLP (Crl.) Nos. 5206-5223 of 2011)

Kumar Etc. Etc. ...Appellant

Versus

Karnataka Industrial Coop. Bank Ltd. & Anr ...Respondents

J U D G M E N T

RANJAN GOGOI, J.

1. Leave granted in each of the Special Leave Petitions.

2. The appellants who have been acquitted of the charges under Sections 406 and 420 read with Section 34 of the Indian Penal code have filed the instant appeals challenging the conviction ordered by the High Court of Karnataka in the exercise of its Revisional Jurisdiction under Section 397 read with Section 401 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The appellant in each of the appeals has been sentenced to undergo R.I. for three months for the offence punishable under Section 406 IPC and R.I for six months for the offence under Section 420 IPC. While both the sentences of imprisonment are to run concurrently, each of the appellants has also been sentenced to pay fine or undergo the default sentence that has been imposed.

3. The facts lie within a short compass and may be briefly enumerated herein under.

The respondent No. 1 in each of these appeals i.e. Karnataka Industrial Corporation Bank Ltd., Hubli (hereinafter shall be referred to 'the complainant Bank') had filed 18 different complaints in the Court of Judicial Magistrate, First Class, Hubli alleging that between 12.07.2003 and 31.03.2004 loans were taken by each of the appellants by mortgaging gold ornaments. According to the complainant Bank, on 10.06.2004, a news item had appeared in the local newspapers that the appraiser of Maratha Cooperative Bank had given false appraisal reports on the basis of which the said bank had granted loans against fake gold ornaments. As the said person was also the appraiser of the complainant Bank the gold ornaments pledged with the complainant bank by the accused were verified through another appraiser (PW.4) who certified the gold ornaments pledged by the accused to be fake. Accordingly, the complaints in question were filed alleging commission of offences under Section 406, 420 read with Section 34 of the IPC by each of the accused persons who had taken loans from the complainant Bank by pledging fake gold ornaments. The complaints were referred, by the learned Magistrate, to the police for investigation and on completion of such investigation charge sheets were filed in the Court against each of the accused. Thereafter charges were framed to which the accused pleaded not guilty and claimed to be tried. All the complaint cases

were taken up for trial together and the evidence of the prosecution was recorded in the complaint case registered and numbered as CC. No. 1235 of 2005. In the course of the trial six witnesses were examined by the prosecution and several documents were also exhibited. Thereafter, the learned trial court by order dated 29.2.2008 acquitted each of the accused of the charges levelled against them. It may also be noticed that during the pendency of the trial, the appraiser, who was impleaded as the second accused had died. Aggrieved by the said acquittal, the complainant Bank instituted separate Revision applications before the High Court of Karnataka. The High Court by its common order dated 16/11/2010 and 22/3/2011 allowed each of the Revision Applications filed by the complainant Bank and convicted and sentenced the accused as aforesaid. Aggrieved the present appeals have been filed.

4. We have heard Mr. Shankar Divate, learned counsel for the appellant and Mr. N.D.B. Raju and Mr. V.N. Raghupathy, learned counsels for the respondents.

5. The revisional jurisdiction of a High Court is conferred by the provisions of Section 397 read with Section 401 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. While Section 397 empowers the High court to call for the record of any proceeding before any inferior criminal court within its jurisdiction to satisfy itself as to the correctness, legality or propriety of any finding, sentence or order and such power extends to suspension of execution of any sentence or order and also to release the accused on bail, under Section 401 (3) Cr.P.C. there is an express bar in the High Courts to convert a finding of acquittal into one of conviction. While the revisional power under the Code would undoubtedly vest in the High Court the jurisdiction to set aside an order of acquittal the same would not extend to permit the conviction of the accused. The High Court may, however, order a retrial or a rehearing of the case, as may be, if so justified. [vide Sheetal Prasad & Ors. v. Sri Kant & Anr.[1] and Johar & Ors. v. Mangal Prasad & Anr.[2]]. In view of the above we do not see how the orders of the High Court dated 16/11/2010 and 22/3/2011 converting the acquittal of the accused appellants to one of conviction and the sentences imposed on each of them can be sustained in law.

6. There is another aspect of the case which cannot be left unaddressed. The Revision Applications filed by the complainant Bank before the High Court were inordinately delayed, i.e., some by 290 days and the others by 785 days. We have read and considered the application filed by the complainant Bank under Section 5 of the Limitation Act, 1963 seeking condonation of the delay that had occurred in instituting the Revision Applications. The entire application is in a single paragraph containing a bald statement that the result of the case (perhaps the order of the trial court) was not intimated to the bank and it is only after getting the requisite information and certified copies of the judgment that the Revision application could be filed. The High Court had condoned the delay on the ground that mere technicalities should not come in the way of rendering justice. While there can be no dispute with the above proposition, we do not see how the same could have had any application to the present case. It was the duty of the High Court to consider the reasons assigned for the delay and thereafter come to the conclusion whether, on the grounds shown, sufficient cause within the meaning of Section 5 of the Limitation Act has been made out. We have already taken note of the contents of the condonation application filed on behalf of the bank and it is our considered view that on the basis of the statements made therein no satisfaction could have been reasonably reached that the complainant Bank was prevented by sufficient cause from filing the Revision Applications in time.

7. We have also been addressed by the learned counsels for the parties at some length on the merits of the matter. To make the discussion complete we may briefly note the reasons that had weighed with the learned trial court to acquit the accused in the present cases. We have considered the evidence tendered by the prosecution witnesses, particularly, Madan Athani (PW-1), A.N. Ramakrishna (PW-2), Irappa Abbigeri (PW-3) and Pandurang (PW-4). Significantly, PW-1 had deposed that a register is maintained with respect to the gold articles pledged with the Bank showing the weight, the



DATE :14/12/2012                    These matters were called  
   on for pronouncement of judgment today.

For Appellant(s)                    Mr. Shanker Divate, Adv.

For Respondent(s)                    Mr.N. Ganpathy, Adv.

   Mr. V.N. Raghupathy, Adv.

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ranjan Gogoi pronounced the judgment of the  
Bench comprising Hon'ble Mr. Justice P. Sathasivam and His Lordship.

Leave granted.

The appeals are allowed.

(Usha Bhardwaj)  
(Court Master)

(Savita Sainani)  
(Court Master)

[Signed reportable judgment is placed on the file ]

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[1]                    2010(2) SCC 190  
[2]                    2008 (3) SCC 423