

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION
CRIMINAL APPEAL NO. 580 OF 2001

State of A.P.

...Appellant

Versus

P. Satyanarayana Murthy

...Respondent

J U D G M E N T

Dr. ARIJIT PASAYAT, J.

1. Challenge in this appeal is to the judgment of a learned Single Judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court directing acquittal of the respondent who faced trial for alleged commission of offence punishable under Section 13(2) read with Section 13(1)(d)(i) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (in short the 'Act'). The trial Court i.e. the Court of Principal Special Judge for SPE & ACB Cases, Hyderabad, found the accused guilty. He was convicted and sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment under each count. Both the sentences were directed to run concurrently. He was also fined with Rs.1000/- under each count with default stipulation.

2. Background facts in a nutshell are as follows:

One Gande Vaikuntam (PW-1) was sanctioned a loan of Rs.15,000/- in the year 1986 by the A.P. Khadi & Village Industries Board, Sangareddy. But due to some unavoidable circumstances he could not

avail the facility. After about three years between April and May 1989 he approached the respondent-accused officer who was the Development Officer of A.P. Khadi & Village Industries Board and requested him for revival of the lapsed loan. According to the defacto complainant, respondent dodged him on 25th May, 1989 when he went to his office at Sangareddy and asked him to see him in the Head Office of A.P. Khadi & Village Industries Board at Hyderabad on 27th May, 1989. Accordingly, the complainant and one Balreddy (PW-2) met the respondent at the Head Office in Hyderabad on 27.5.1989. The respondent demanded bribe of Rs.500/- from him so that his loan case could be revived. He also told PW-1 to meet him on 31st May, 1989 at 8.00 a.m. at his residence. PW-1 approached the Dy. Superintendent of Police, A.C.B. Nizamabad and gave a report. On 31.5.1989 at about 7.25 a.m. PW-1 met the respondent who demanded and accepted the sum of Rs.500/- from him in presence of D. Sridhar Reddy and Ch. Narsimha Reddi. The respondent was caught red handed and bribe money was recovered in presence of mediators from the respondent. To prove the accusations the prosecution examined eight witnesses and 31 exhibits were exhibited. Accused examined one witness and exhibited 2 exhibits.

The trial Court found the evidence of PWs 1 and 2 to be clear and cogent and accordingly recorded the conviction and sentence as afore-stated. In appeal before the High Court it was submitted that the accusations have not been established so far as the respondent is concerned. The High Court held that according to the evidence of prosecution the application given by PW-1 was found in the brief case of the accused person. But the High court observed that normally one would expect that if the accused officer kept the application in the brief case he would also keep the money in the brief case and it is

not expected that he would keep the money on a tea-pot and the application in the brief case. This according to the High Court created doubt whether any money was demanded and received by the accused person. It was further observed that the evidence of PW-1 was not corroborated. Although there was an independent witness available, he was not examined. The High Court also observed that non examination of one Narsimha Reddi rendered the prosecution version fragile. Accordingly, the conviction was set aside and acquittal was directed.

Questioning the acquittal, the State of Andhra Pradesh has filed this appeal.

3. Learned counsel for the appellant-State submitted that the High Court by a cryptic order has set aside the well reasoned judgment of the trial Court. Merely because some persons were not examined, same cannot be a ground to discard the evidence of a reliable witness. It is pointed out that the bribe money purported to have been given by Narsimha Reddi was also seized. The Investigating Officer had clearly stated the reasons for the non examination of Narsimha Reddi. It was stated that he had joined naxalites. The presumption available under Section 20 of the Act was not kept in view by the High Court. It is submitted that the High Court's conclusions are based on surmises and, therefore, the judgment of acquittal cannot be maintained.

4. Learned counsel for the respondent on the other hand submitted that the High Court has analysed the evidence in great detail to find that the prosecution version is not believable. That being so, there was no scope for any interference in this appeal.

5. It is to be noted that the evidence of PW-1 has not been discarded by the High Court. But it is observed by the High Court that there was no corroboration to the evidence of PW-1 and therefore it recorded the order of acquittal. The evidence of PW-1 does not suffer from any infirmity. Mere non-examination of any other person would not render his evidence suspect. The IO has categorically stated that Narsimha Reddi was not available to be examined as a witness. Further, there was no suggestion given by the accused that money was forced on his hands and thereafter he put it on the table. No such suggestion was given and for the first time during examination under Section 313 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (in short the 'Code') such a stand was taken. The High Court has also not considered the effect of the presumption flowing from Section 20 of the Act. It is not understood as to the basis on which the High Court found that accused would not put the application form and the money in different places. The conclusion has no basis. The accused did not dispute that the application form (Ext.P5) was found in a brief case. In fact the bribed money from Narsimha Reddi was also seized. It has been clearly indicated by the witness that the money given by PW-1 and money given to Narsimha Reddi were kept side by side and were not mixed up. In the present case, the trial Court had elaborately dealt with the evidence to record conviction. The High court has not indicated any reason as to how the conclusions of the trial Court are wrong. In any event, the High Court by a cryptic conclusion held that the evidence led was not sufficient. As noted above, reasons for Narsimha Reddi's non examination has been disclosed by the prosecution.

6. Above being the position, the judgment of the High Court is clearly unsustainable and set aside. Considering the background facts,

one year custodial sentence with fine of Rs.1,000/- as was imposed by the trial Court are imposed. The respondent shall surrender to custody forthwith to serve the remainder of sentence.

7. The appeal is allowed to the aforesaid extent.

.....J.
(Dr. ARIJIT PASAYAT)

.....J.
(P. SATHASIVAM)

.....J.
(AFTAB ALAM)

New Delhi
October 3, 2008