Jalandhar Singh Vs State of Punjab and Another

Court: High Court Of Punjab And Haryana At Chandigarh

Date of Decision: Sept. 4, 1991

Acts Referred: Constitution of India, 1950 â€" Article 161, 226, 227

Citation: (1992) CriLJ 1772 : (1994) 1 ILR (P&H) 1 : (1992) 101 PLR 42 : (1992) 1 RCR(Criminal) 11 : (1992) 1 RCR(Criminal) 467

Hon'ble Judges: I.S. Tiwana, Acting C.J.; Jawahar Lal Gupta, J

Bench: Division Bench

Advocate: V.K. Jindal, for the Appellant; O.P. Goyal, Addl. A. G., for the Respondent

Judgement

Jawahar Lal Gupta, J.
Is heinousness of crime wholly extraneous to the grant of pardon or pre-nature release ? A learned Single Judge in

Maru Ram and Others Vs. Union of India (UOI) and Others, , has taken the view that ""the heinousness or gravity of the offence is no legal ground

to discriminate the case of one accused with the cases of other accused....."" This view appears to have been reiterated in later decisions viz.,

Dalbir Singh v. State of Haryana (1989) Cri.LJ. 290 and in Sehaj Ram v. State of Haryana, (1990) 17 C. L. T. 193 (Har). Sekhon, J. has

expressed reservation about the view taken in Mithu Singh''s case. On a reference this matter has come up before us.

2. Mr. Vijay Jindal, learned counsel for the petitioner has vehemently contended that heinousness or gravity of the offence is a matter which is

considered by the Court while awarding punishment. It is not relevant to the question of pre-mature release of the convict. He has further

contended that the State Government having issued instructions vide letter dated December 12, 1985 (Annexure P. 2), the mercy petitions had to

be examined only in accordance with the instructions. Heinousness of the offence is not one of the factors mentioned in the letter and cannot thus

be taken into consideration.

On the other hand, Mr. O. P. Goyal, learned Additional Advocate General appearing on behalf of the respondents has contended that the

Constitution confers very wide powers on the Executive Head of the State and no impediments can be placed thereon. He further contends that

the various factors mentioned in the instructions issued by the Government from time to time are only illustrative and not exhaustive of the grounds

which can be taken into consideration while deciding the case for pre-mature release.

3. A word about the necessity and nature of the power to pardon . It has been recognised since the hoary past. In the words of Chief Justice

Marshal ""this power had been exercised from time immemorial by the Executive of that nation whose language is our language, and to whose

judicial institutions ours bare a close resemblance..."" In the words of Chief Justice Taft in Philip Grossman''s case 69 L. ED. 527.

Executive clemency exists to afford relief from undue harshness or evident mistake in the operation or enforcement of the criminal law. The

administration of justice by the Courts is not necessarily always wise or certainly considerate of circumstances which may properly mitigate guilt.

To afford a remedy, it has always been thought essential in popular governments, as well as in monarchies, to vest in some other authority than the.

courts power to ameliorate or avoid particular criminal judgments. It is a check entrusted to the Executive for special cases. To exercise it to the

extent of destroying the deterrent effect of judicial punishment would be to pervert it; but whoever is to make it useful must have full discretion to

exercise it. Our Constitution confers this discretion on the highest officer in the nation in confidence that he will not abuse it."" (Emphasis'' supplied)

4. As in America, so under our own Constitution, the power of clemency has been conferred by the Constitution on the President of India and the

Governors of States. The relevant provisions occur in Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution. The scope of these provisions has been considered

by various Courts. The provisions fell for pointed consideration in Nanawati''s case before a Full Bench of the Bombay High Court and later on

before the Apex Court in K.M. Nanavati Vs. The State of Bombay, . in the year 1978 when the Parliament enacted and added Section 433A of

the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Supreme Court considered the matter in Maru Ram and Others Vs. Union of India (UOI) and Others, . After

a review of the case law, a Constitution Bench in the words of Krishna Iyer, J. observed as under :-

Para P.-It is apparent that superficially viewed, the two powers, one constitutional and the other statutory, are co-extensive. But two things may

be similar but not the same. That is precisely the difference. We cannot: agree that the power which is the creature of the Code can be equated

with a high prerogative vested by the Constitution in the highest functionaries of the Union and the States. The source is different, the substance is

different, the strength is different, although the stream may be flowing along the same bed. We see the two powers as far from being identical, and,

obviously, the Constitutional power is ''untouchable'' and unapproachable and cannot suffer the vicissitudes of simple legislative processes.

Therefore, Section 433A cannot be invalidated as indirectly violative of Articles 72 and 161. What the Code gives, it can take, and so, an

embargo on Sections 432 and 433(a) is within the legislative power of Parliament.

Para 60.-Even so, we must remember the Constitutional status of Articles 72 and 161 and it is common ground that Section 433A does not and

cannot affect even a wee-bit the pardon power of the Governor or the President. The necessary sequel to this logic is that notwithstanding Section

433A the President and the Governor continue to exercise the power of commutation and release under the aforesaid Articles.

5. Recently another Constitution Bench of the Apex Court in Kehar Singh and Another Vs. Union of India (UOI) and Another, inter alia observed

as under :-

Learned counsel for the petitioners next urged that in order to prevent an arbitrary exercise of power under Article 72 this Court should draw up a

set of guidelines for regulating the exercise of the power. It seems to us that there is sufficient indication in the terms of Article 72 and in the history

of the power enshrined in that provision as well as existing case law, and specific guidelines need not be spelled out. Indeed, it may not be possible

to lay down any precise, clearly defined and sufficiently channelised guidelines, for we must remember that the power under Article 72 is of the

widest amplitude.

6. The power is thus of widest amplitude. Its exercise cannot be cabined or cripped by ""any precise, clearly defined and sufficiently channelised

guidelines."" In spite of the widest amplitude of the power, Mr. Jindal contends that the President and the Governor are precluded from taking into

consideration the heinousness of the crime. Relying on the view in Mithu Singh"s case, the learned counsel submits that all life convicts form one

class and they cannot be treated differently on the basis of the heinousness or the gravity of the crime. Both on the basis of principle and precedent,

we find no reationale behind the contention. While considering the constitutional validity of Section 433A of the Code of Criminal Procedure and

the scope of Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution of India in Maru Ram"s case, the Apex Court laid down certain principles. In paragraph 72

(10) it was observed as under :-

Although the remission rules or short-sentencing provision proprio vigore may not apply as against Section 433A, they will override Section 433A

if the Government, Central or State, guides itself by the self-same rules or schemes in the exercise of its constitutional power. We regard it as fair

that until fresh rules are made in keeping with experience gathered, current social conditions and accepted penological thinking a desirable step, in

our view the present remission and release schemes may usefully be taken as guidelines under Articles 72/161 and orders for release passed. We

cannot fault the Government, if in some intractably savage delinquents, Section 433A is itself treated as a guidelines for exercise of Articles 72/161.

These observations of ours are recommendatory to avoid a hiatus, but it is for Government, Central or State, to decide whether and why the-

current Remission Rules should not survive until replaced by a more wholesome scheme.

7. The underlined portion in our view is a clear indication that in case of ""intractably savage delinquents"" the yard-stick for the grant of mercy could

be different from that in other cases. Soon thereafter in the case commonly known as Billa Ranga''s case (Kuljeet Singh alias Ranga Vs. Union of

India (UOI) and Anr,), Chief Justice Chandrachud observed that:-

The death of the Chopra children was caused by the petitioner and his companion Billa after a savage planning which bears a professional stamp.

The murder was most certainly not committed on the spur of the moment as a result of some irresistible impulse which can be said to have

overtaken the accused at. the crucial, moment. In other words, there was a planned motivation behind the crime though the accused had no

personal motive to commit the murder of these two children.

Further it was observed as under:-

the survival of an orderly society demands the. extinction of the life of persons like Ranga and Billa who are a menace to social order and security.

They are professional murderers and deserve no sympathy even in terms of the evolving standards of decency of a maturing society.

8. After dismissal of Appeal by the Supreme Court and the mercy petition by the President, a petition under Article 32 was moved before the

Supreme Court. It was contended that the power conferred by Article 72 of the Constitution was a power coupled with duty which had to be

exercised fairly and reasonably in Kuljeet Singh alias Ranga v. Lt. Governor, Delhi and Anr. A. I. R. 1981 S. C. 2239. Rule Nisi was issued. The

execution of death penalty in all cases was stayed However, finally the case was disposed of with the following observations reported in Kuljeet

Singh alias Ranga and Another Vs. Lt.-Governor of Delhi and Others, .

But the question as to whether the case is appropriate for I the exercise of the power conferred by Article 72 depends upon the facts and

circumstances of each particular case. The necessity or the justification for exercising that power has therefore to be judged from case to case. In

fact, we do not see what useful purpose will be achieved by the petitioner by ensuring the imposition of any severe, judicially evolved constraints

on the wholesome power of the President to use it as the justice of a case may require After all, the power conferred by Article 72 can be used

only for the purpose of reducing the sentence, not for eahancing it We need not, however, go into that question elaborately because in so far as this

case is concerned, we are quite clear that not even the most liberal use of his mercy jurisdiction could have presuaded the President to interfere

with the sentence of death imposed upon the petitioner, in view particularly of the considerations mentioned by us in our judgment in Kuljeet Singh

alias Ranga Vs. Union of India (UOI) and Anr, We may recall, what we said in that judgment that ""the death of the Chopra children was caused

by the petitioner and his companion Billa after a savage planning which bears a professional stamps"", that the ""survival of an orderly society

demands the extinction of. the life of persons like Ranga and Billa who are a menace to social order and security"", and that ""they are professional

murderers and deserve no sympathy even in terms of the evolving standards of decency of a mature society.

2. The petition is accordingly dismissed.

9. A perusal of the above would show that while exercising power under Articles 72/161 of the Constitution of India, the facts and circumstances

of each case can be taken into consideration. The heinousness of the crime which had been perpetrated by Billa and Ranga had persuaded the

Supreme Court to hold that even the most liberal use of mercy jurisdiction could not have persuaded the President to interfere with the sentence of

death. Apparently the heinousness of crime and the ''intractable savagery'' of the delinquent are factors which have been considered to be relevant

for the exercise of power under Articles 72/161 of the Constitution. Even otherwise, whatever is relevant for the Court while awarding punishment

can by no process of law or logic become irrelevant or extraneous for the Government while considering of pre-mature release.

10. While exercising powers under Articles 72/161 of the Constitution, the appropriate authority is competent to examine the record of the criminal

case. It is also competent to take into consideration such evidence as may have come into its possession beside as the evidence on the file of the

Court. Nothing considered in this regard can be dubbed as extraneous. Just as in the case of Billa and Ranga. the gravity of the offence persuaded

the Court to hold that the President could not have awarded a punishment less than death sentence, the executive authority can in all cases examine

various factors including the heinousness or gravity of the offence to decide as to whether or not pre-mature release of a convict is desirable. The

conflict between individual''s freedom and social order has to be reasonably balanced on a comprehensive consideration of all relevant factors.

Heinousness or gravity of the offence are not irrelevant to that consideration.

11. We are also unable to accept the contention that the question of pre-mature release has to be considered only on the grounds mentioned in the

letter dated December 12, 1985 or that the heinousness of crime is specifically excluded under the said letter. Exercise of mercy jurisdiction

involves a permutation and combination of a large number of factors. No executive authority can visualise all permutations and combinations and

lay down guidelines of universal application. It can only think of some and incorporate them by way of guidelines. No such compilation can be

exhaustive in its scope. In any event the letter of December 12, 1985 to which repeated reference has been made by the learned counsel does not

in any way exclude the gravity of the offence as one of the factors relevant for the decision of the mercy petition. In this letter, it is inter alia

mentioned as under :-

The aspect of young/adolescent age, sex, mental deficiency, grave or sudden provocation and absence of motive and premeditation should also

be the factors while scrutinising the copies of the judgments in mercy petition cases.

12. Factors like grave or sudden provocation and absence of motive and premeditation are relevant for determining the heinous-ness of the crime.

These have been specifically included in the letter of December 12, 1985. Whatever was implicit in this letter has letter on been clarified by the

Government by its letter of July 8, 1991, a copy of which was produced before us during the hearing. The convicts have been classified under

different heads. Heinousness of the crime is specifically made relevant. In view of these instructions, the contention based on instructions has

primarily become academic. However, in view of the fact that even in the letter of December 12, 1985, the heinousness of the crime has not been

excluded, the question need not be examined any further.

13. We are also of the view that all convicts cannot be classified as one homogeneous class. They can be classified on the basis of different

considerations. Heinousness or gravity of the offence committed by a convict can be one of the basis for classification. Billa and Ranga can in a

given situation be treated as a class apart from an ordinary convict, who may have committed murder in an entirely different situation. While it may

not be open to the executive to make the classification on the basis of wholly arbitrary or extraneous criteria, we entertain no doubt that in principle

the classification can be founded on the gravity of the offence. Mr. Jindal has referred to the various provisions of the Punjab Jail Manual to

contend that the convicts have been classified by a uniform criteria and their further classification on the basis of the supposed heinousness of the

crime would be unfair and inequittable. In our view the provisions of the Jail Manual are merely guidelines which can be taken into consideration by

the Governor while passing orders under Article 161 of the Constitution. These do not preclude the Governor from taking into consideration

factors like heinousness of the crime.

14. In view of the above, we answer the question posed at the threshold in the negative and hold that the heinousness of the crime is not

extraneous to the grant of pardon or pre-mature release. We are also of the view that the decisions of this High Court in Mithu Singh''s case 1989

(1) R C. R. 238. Dalbir Singh''s case (1989) 2 C. L. R. 290. and in Sehaj Ram''s case (1990) 17 C. L. T. 193 suggesting that heinousness is

irrelevant, do not lay down correct law. The case will now go back to the learned Single Judge for decision on merits.