

MUSTAQ AHMED MOHED HUSSAIN
MUKHTAR HUSSAIN ALI HUSSAIN

v.

THE STATE OF GUJARAT

March 13, 1973

[A. ALAGIRISWAMI, I. D. DUA AND C. A. VAIDIALINGAM, JJ.]

Code of Criminal Procedure s. 421—Power of High Court to dismiss appeal in limine—When may be exercised—High Court must record reasons and it is not sufficient to say ‘dismissed’.

In this appeal by special leave the short question requiring determination was whether the High Court of Gujarat was justified in dismissing *in limine* with one word ‘dismissed’ the appellants’ appeal against their conviction by the Sessions Judge, Jamnagar for offences under s. 420 read with ss. 511 and 34, I.P.C. and under s. 474 read with s. 34, Indian Penal Code.

Allowing the appeal,

HELD: Section 421 Cr.P.C. no doubt empowers the appellate court to dismiss the appeal summarily but before doing so it is bound to peruse with care and attention the petition of appeal and the copy of the judgment or order appealed against. The order of summary dismissal can be passed only if the court considers that there is no sufficient ground for interference. This conclusion has to be arrived at judicially after a proper scrutiny of the petition of appeal and the impugned judgment or order. [673G]

The power of dismissing appeals *in limine* should be exercised sparingly and with judicious caution so that no case raising arguable points, whether of law or of fact requiring re-appraisal of evidence, goes without requisite scrutiny. The requirement of recording reasons for summary dismissal, however concise, serves to ensure proper functioning of the judicial process. Reasons are, therefore, advisedly required by the decisions of this Court to be given for rejecting an appeal summarily under s. 421 Cr. P. C. [674D]

The contention that when the trial court records a well reasoned judgment, then, even though arguable points on the question of the credibility of witnesses are raised, it is unnecessary for the court of appeal to deal with all these points and record its own reasons for agreeing with the conclusions of the trial court, was unacceptable. Unless the challenge can be held to be *prima facie* unimpressive and unarguable the High Court would be well-advised to go into the points canvassed and record its reasons. Such a course would be in accord with the statutory intendment, and also of assistance to this Court in more satisfactorily dealing with appeals under Art. 136 of the Constitution. [677D]

In the present case the trial court’s judgment mentioned several discrepancies in the prosecution evidence. The appellants were not unjustified in claiming to have the evidence on the record re-examined by the High Court for coming to its own conclusions. The points raised in the petition of appeal could by no means be said to be unarguable.

A Without expressing any opinion on the merits of the case the Court sent the case back to the High Court for a fresh decision in the light of this Court's observation.

B *U. J. S. Chopra v. State of Bombay*, [1955] 2 S.C.R. 94, *Queen Empress v. Ram Narain & anr.*, 1.L.R. 8 All. 514, *Mohamad Ayub Abbcs Raut v. The State of Maharashtra*, CrI. A. No. 145 of 1961 decided on March 25, 1963, *Mushtak Hussain v. The State of Bombay*, [1953] S.C.R. 809, *Bhagat Singh v. State of Rajasthan*, CrI. A. No. 38 of 1969 decided on September 17, 1969, *Shankar Beldar v. The State of Maharashtra*, CrI. A. No. 95 of 1969 decided on September 18, 1969, *K. K. Jain v. State of Maharashtra* A.I.R. 1973 S.C. 243, *Jiwan Prakash v. State of Maharashtra*, A.I.R. 1973 S.C. 278, *Shaikh Mohd. Ali v. State of Maharashtra*, [1972] 2 S.C.C. 784 and *Rajendrapaul Ramasaran Dass Sharma v. The State of Maharashtra*, CrI. Appeal No. 264 of 1972 decided on February 23, 1973, referred to.

C CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION : Criminal Appeal No. 9 of 1973.

D Appeal by special leave from the judgment and order dated July 31, 1972 of the Gujarat High Court in Cr. Appeal No. 596 of 1972.

K. K. Sinha and *S. K. Sinha*, for the appellants.

Urmila Kapoor, *B. D. Sharma* and *S. P. Nayar*, for the respondent.

E The Judgment of the Court was delivered by

F DUA, J.—In this appeal by special leave the short question requiring determination is whether the High Court of Gujarat was justified in dismissing *in limine* with one word “dismissed” the appellants’ appeal against their conviction by the Sessions Judge, Jamnagar for offences under s. 420 read with ss. 511 and 34, I.P.C. and under s. 474 read with s. 34, Indian Penal Code.

G Both the appellants were charged on five counts in the court of the Sessions Judge relating to offences, *inter alia* of forging railway receipts purporting to be valuable security, being in possession of forged receipts knowing them to be forged and of dishonestly or fraudulently using the forged receipts as genuine knowing them to be forged, in furtherance of the common intention of cheating the Indian Railways or attempting to cheat them.

The points which arose for determination in the trial court as stated in its judgment were :

H “(1) Whether the prosecution has proved that on or about 7-8-71 at Jamnagar accused no. 1 Mustaq Ahmed Mohmed Hussein and accused no. 2 Mukhtar Hussein Ali Hussein Sayed in furtherance of common intention of both to cheat the Indian Railway by using forged

railway receipts actually forged three railway receipts mark 6/A, 6/B and 6/C purporting to be valuable security and thereby committed an offence punishable under section 467 read with section 34, I.P. Code ?

(2) Whether the prosecution has proved that on or before 7-8-71 said accused nos. 1 and 2 in furtherance of the common intention of both to cheat Indian Railway forged railway receipts mark 6/A, 6/B and 6/C intending that they shall be used for the purpose of cheating they thereby committed the offence punishable under section 468 read with section 34 of the Indian Penal Code ?

(3) Whether the prosecution has proved that said accused nos. 1 and 2 on or about 7-8-71 in furtherance of common intention of both to cheat Indian Railway fraudulently or dishonestly used as genuine the three railway receipts marked 6/A, 6/B and 6/C which they knew or had reason to believe at the time they used them to be the forged documents and thereby committed the offence under section 471 read with section 34, I.P. Code ?

(4) Whether the prosecution has proved that on or about 7-8-71 both the said accused nos. 1 and 2 were in possession of the forged railway receipts purporting to be valuable security knowing the same to be forged and intending that the same shall be fraudulently used as genuine documents and thereby committed an offence punishable under s. 474 read with section 34, I.P. Code ?

(5) Whether the prosecution has proved that on or about 7-8-71 accused nos. 1 and 2 were at Jamnagar and in furtherance of common intention of both of them to cheat Indian Railway attempted to cheat Western Railway by dishonestly inducing the railway employees, i.e., the goods clerk at Jamnagar railway station to deliver them Coal Wagons in question and thereby committed the offence punishable under section 420 read with section 34 and s. 511 of the Indian Penal Code ?"

On points nos. 1 to 3 the decision of the trial court went in favour of the appellants and against the prosecution but on points nos. 4 and 5 the appellants were held guilty and convicted. They were sentenced under s. 420 read with ss. 511 and 34, I.P.C. to rigorous imprisonment for three years and a fine of Rs. 1,000/- with further rigorous imprisonment for nine months in case of default in payment of fine. A similar sentence was imposed on each one of them for the offence under ss. 474/34, I.P.C. Both

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A the sentences were ordered to run concurrently. It appears from the judgment of the trial court which covers about forty pages of exhaustive discussion on the points raised that a large number of witnesses were examined at the trial and the court entertained considerable doubt with respect to the prosecution story on several aspects of the various charges framed against the appellants.

B On appeal in the High Court the appellants challenged all the adverse findings of the trial court, as they were entitled to do under s. 410 read with s. 418, Cr. P.C., and assailed the appraisal and evaluation of the evidence of the prosecution witnesses by that court. More than 20 grounds were taken in the memorandum of appeal in which the testimony of the various eye-witnesses was criticised and the approach of the learned Sessions Judge in this respect assailed. As already pointed out, the High Court dismissed the appeal *in limine* with one word "dismissed" without indicating whether it also endorsed the line of reasoning and approach of the trial court in evaluating the testimony of the various witnesses and its manner of dealing with the arguments advanced by the prosecution and the defence.

D In this Court it was seriously contended on behalf of the appellants that the High Court had gravely erred in summarily dismissing the appeal *in limine* without disclosing even broadly its reasons for rejecting the various grounds of attack against the appraisal of the prosecution evidence by the trial court. This, according to the appellants learned counsel, is against the consistent and uniform view expressed by this Court that in arguable cases the High Court, while dismissing the appeal, broadly indicate its reasons in support of its conclusions. The judgment of the High Court has, in this case, resulted in failure of justice to the appellants' prejudice, said the counsel.

E In our view, the appellants' grievance is well-founded. The right of appeal conferred by s. 410 read with s. 418, Cr. P.C. entitled the appellants to question the conclusions of the trial court both on matters of fact and of law. They had a right to ask for a review of the entire evidence and to challenge the appraisal of the evidence by the trial court and its conclusions based on such appraisal. Section 421, Cr. P.C. no doubt empowers the appellate court to dismiss the appeal summarily but before doing so it is bound to peruse with care and attention the petition of appeal and the copy of the judgment or order appealed against. The order of summary dismissal can be passed only if the court considers that there is no sufficient ground for interference. This conclusion has to be arrived at judicially after a proper scrutiny of the petition of the appeal and the impugned judgment or order.

H In *U. J. S. Chopra v. State of Bombay*⁽¹⁾ Bhagwati J., speaking

(1) [1955] 2 S.C.R. 94.

for the majority expressed the view that the hearing under s. 421 is intended for the purpose of determining whether a *prima facie* case for the appellate court's interference is made out. The whole purpose of the hearing accorded to the appellant or his counsel, even after calling for the record of the case, under this section, is to determine whether there is a *prima facie* case for the appellate court's interference and it is not within that court's province at that stage to fully consider the evidence on the record and hear arguments with a view to determine whether the conviction could be sustained or the sentence passed could be reduced. No doubt the question directly arising in that case was somewhat different, but the observations with respect to the purpose of the hearing under s. 421, Cr. P.C. would be equally applicable to the consideration of the present controversy. If such be the real purpose of hearing contemplated by s. 421, then, the power of dismissing appeals *in limine* should, in our view, be exercised sparingly and with judicious caution so that no case raising arguable points, whether of law or of fact requiring re-appraisal of evidence, goes without requisite scrutiny. The requirement of recording reasons for summary dismissal, however concise, serves to ensure proper functioning of the judicial process. Reasons are, therefore, advisedly required by the decisions of this Court to be given for rejecting an appeal summarily under s. 421, Cr. P.C. Similar view was taken by the Allahabad High Court as far back as 1886 in *Queen Empress v. Ram Narain & Anr.*⁽¹⁾. Although that was a case in which the appeal had been dismissed by the Sessions Judge, the considerations prevailing in such a case may equally well apply to cases where the High Court dismisses an appeal *in limine* for the reason, *inter alia*, that this Court may, when approached by the aggrieved party to exercise its power under Art. 136 of the Constitution, have the benefit of the views of the High Court. With speaking orders justice is also seen to be done.

Turning now to the decisions directly dealing with the point raised by the appellants, this Court has consistently and uniformly held that in cases raising arguable points the High Courts would be well-advised to make speaking orders indicating their reasons, however concise, inducing them to dismiss the appeals *in limine*. The learned counsel on behalf of the State, Mrs. Urmila Kanur, without disputing that where arguable and substantial questions of fact or law are raised on appeal the High Court is, according to the decisions of this Court, expected to write a speaking order however brief, dealing with and disposing of the points canvassed before it submitted that in the present case there were no arguable or substantial points involved and, therefore, the High Court was justified in dismissing the appeal *in limine* without indicating its

(1) I.L.R. 8 All. 514.

A reasons therefor. She, however, referred us specifically to an un-
reported decision of this Court in *Mohammad Ayub Abbas Raut*
v. *The State of Maharashtra*⁽¹⁾. According to the learned
counsel, this decision has not been noticed by this Court in its
later decisions disapproving the dismissal *in limine* by the High
Courts of appeals from judgments of learned Sessions Judges.
B This argument, on first impression, appeared to suggest that the
learned counsel wanted us to re-examine the numerous decisions
of this Court uniformly disapproving the practice, prevailing in
some High Courts, of too readily dismissing *in limine*, with one
word "dismissed", appeals from the Sessions Courts even where
arguable points of fact or law are apparent on the face of the im-
pugned judgment or order. Mrs. Kapur, however, soon clarified
C her position by submitting that she only wanted to contend that
in the present case this Court should not interfere with the High
Court's judgment as there were no arguable or substantial points
involved in the appeal and *Mohd. Ayub* (supra) was only cited
as a precedent to support this contention. According to her the
judgment of the trial court is detailed and well-considered, sound
D reasons having been given in support of its conclusions : it was
accordingly unnecessary for the High Court to specifically deal
with the various points raised in the petition of appeal and to
record its reasons for rejecting various grounds of challenge can-
vassed before it.

E In our view, *Mohd. Ayub Abbas Raut* (supra) does not in
any way cast a doubt on the soundness of the various reasons
which have consistently prevailed with this Court firmly disapprov-
ing dismissal *in limine* with one word "dismissed" of appeals before
the High Courts from the judgments of Sessions Courts which
raised arguable points of fact or law. The view expressed in
earlier decisions was not dissented from. Indeed no reference was
F made to them. On the contrary it was observed that on the find-
ings of the trial court not considered erroneous by the High Court
the latter was justified in dismissing the appeal *in limine* as it had
full power to do so in exercise of its discretion under s. 421, Cr.
P.C. That the High Court has power to dismiss *in limine* has
always been accepted by this Court. What this Court has consis-
G tently and uniformly laid down is that where arguable points of
fact or law are raised then the High Court would be well-advised
to indicate its reasons for dismissing the appeal *in limine*. This
view is now firmly established and there has never been any
dissent. No doubt, even now we come across stray cases from
some High Courts in which, either in ignorance of the legal posi-
H tion firmly settled by this Court in a string of authorities, or
erroneously thinking that there is no arguable point of fact or

(1) CrI. A. No. 145 of 1961 decided on March 25, 1963.

law involved in an appeal under s. 410, Cr. P.C. from the judgment of Sessions Court, actually and *prima facie* raising arguable points on the question of appreciation of evidence, appeals are dismissed *in limine* with one word "dismissed" without indicating its reasons. It is because of such cases that we consider it necessary once again to refer to some of the decisions of this Court in which the legal position has been declared and re-stated.

In *Mushtak Hussein v. The State of Bombay*⁽¹⁾ Mahajan J., (as he then was) observed :

"With great respect we are however constrained to observe that it was not right for the High Court to have dismissed the appeal preferred by the appellant to that court summarily, as it certainly raised some arguable points which required consideration though we have not thought it fit to deal with all of them. In cases which *prima facie* raise no arguable issue that course is, of course, justified, but this Court would appreciate it if in arguable cases the summary rejection order gives some indication of the views of the High Court on the points raised. Without the opinion of the High Court on such points in special leave petitions under article 136 of the Constitution this Court sometimes feels embarrassed if it has to deal with those matters without the benefit of that opinion."

In *Bhagat Singh v. State of Rajasthan*⁽²⁾ Bhargava and Hegde JJ., sent the case back for re-decision as the appeal had been dismissed summarily. The same Bench in *Vishwanath Shankar Beldar v. The State of Maharashtra*⁽³⁾ adopted a similar course. The view expressed in *Mush'ak Hussein* (supra) was reiterated in *K. K. Jain v. State of Maharashtra*⁽⁴⁾. In *Jiwan Prakash v. State of Maharashtra*⁽⁵⁾ this Court had drawn the attention of the High Courts to as many as 13 cases in which this Court had consistently sent the matters back for re-hearing. In *Shaikh Mohd. Ali v. State of Maharashtra*⁽⁶⁾ Shelat J., speaking for the Court again emphasised that a High Court would not be justified in dismissing summarily and without a speaking order an appeal raising arguable questions either factual or legal. Reference in this decision was made to *Mushtak Hussein* (supra) and *Jiwan Prakash* (supra). Since then on several occasions again this Court has reaffirmed this view. The most recent decision in which this Court felt constrained to remand the case to the High Court for a fresh decision is *Rajendrapaul Ramasaran*

(1) [1953] S.C.R. 809.

(2) Cr. A. No. 38 of 1969 decided on September 17, 1969.

(3) Cr. A. No. 95 of 1969 decided on September 18, 1969.

(4) A.I.R. 1973 S.C. 243.

(5) A.I.R. 1973 S.C. 278.

(6) (1972) 2 S.C.C. 784.

A *Dass Sharma v. The State of Maharashtra*⁽¹⁾. In that decision various aspects have again been considered to impress upon the High Court the inexpediency and impropriety of disposing of with one word "dismissed" the appeals before it which raise arguable points.

B The contention that, when the trial court records a well-reasoned judgment, then, even though arguable points on the question of credibility of witnesses are raised, it is unnecessary for the Court of appeal to deal with all these points and record its own reasons for agreeing with the conclusions of the trial court, is unacceptable. The right of appeal conferred on a convicted person gives him a right to challenge the reasoning and finding on the appraisal of evidence both oral and documentary by the trial court and unless the challenge can be held to be *prima facie* unimpressive and unarguable the High Court would be well-advised to go into the points canvassed and record its reasons. Such a course would be in accord with the statutory intendment, and also of assistance to this Court in more satisfactorily dealing with appeals under Art. 136 of the Constitution.

D The judgment of the trial court in the present case clearly shows that in order to arrive at a safe conclusion the entire evidence on the record has to be closely scrutinised. The trial court devoted several pages for the purpose of proper appraisal of the evidence, discarding some of the contentions of the prosecuting counsel, as unsupportable on the material on the record. That court also noticed some discrepancies in the evidence of some of the witnesses for the prosecution, considered them to the minor and, therefore, immaterial. Further found defects in the working of the Railways as regards the movement of goods wagons and, according to the trial court, had there been a proper system of checking and tallying at the relevant railway stations, what has unfortunately happened in the present case would perhaps have been avoided.

E On appraisal of the evidence, the offences under ss. 467 and 468, I.P.C. were held not proved, there being no reliable evidence on those points. Again, on the actual fraudulent or dishonest use of forged documents also the trial court felt that the prosecution evidence fell short of the main ingredients and only an attempt had been made by the accused persons to use the forged documents with the result that they were acquitted of the charge under s. 471. I.P.C. The trial court also seems to have taken into account the suspicious conduct of the appellants in coming to the conclusion about their guilt under s. 420, I.P.C. read with ss. 415 and 34. I.P.C. and under ss. 474/34, I.P.C. This discussion clearly shows that the appellants were not unjustified in claiming to have the evidence on the record re-examined by the High Court

(1) Crl. Appeal No. 264 of 1972 decided on February 23, 1973.

for coming to its own conclusions, of course, after considering the views of the trial court and giving due weight to that court's reasoning and conclusion. Recording of reasons by the High Court for its conclusion on all the relevant aspects was thus necessary because even the trial court had not completely and unreservedly accepted the evidence led by the prosecution and the charges pressed against the appellants. The points raised as disclosed in the petition of appeal could by no means be said to be unarguable. Without expressing any opinion on the merits of the case, we are constrained to allow this appeal and send the case back to the High Court for a fresh decision in the light of the observations made above. Had the High Court recorded its reasons in support of the order dismissing the appeal perhaps this remand could have been avoided and the appellants saved the further delay in the final disposal of their appeal by the High Court. The appeal is accordingly allowed and the case sent back for a fresh decision.

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G.C.

Appeal allowed.