

Supreme Court of India

Prakash Chand vs State (Delhi Administration) on 20 November, 1978

Equivalent citations: 1979 AIR 400, 1979 SCR (2) 330

Author: O C Reddy

Bench: Reddy, O. Chinnappa (J)

PETITIONER:

PRAKASH CHAND

Vs.

RESPONDENT:

STATE (DELHI ADMINISTRATION)

DATE OF JUDGMENT 20/11/1978

BENCH:

REDDY, O. CHINNAPPA (J)

BENCH:

REDDY, O. CHINNAPPA (J)

SARKARIA, RANJIT SINGH

CITATION:

1979 AIR 400 1979 SCR (2) 330

1979 SCC (3) 90

CITATOR INFO :

D 1985 SC 79 (13)

ACT:

Prevention of Corruption Act-Uncorroborated testimony of trap witness, whether sufficient foundation for conviction-Evidence Act S. 8, conduct of accused confronted by police officer during investigation, admissibility whether executed by s. 162 Cr, P.C. 1974.

HEADNOTE:

Prakash Chand an overseer-Section officer in the Delhi Development Authority office, was charged under s. 5(1)(d) read with 8. 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruptions Act and s. 161 IPC, for demanding and accepting Rs. 30/- bribe from the trap witness Ram Niwas Sharma. an architect, for permitting him to make some necessary corrections in the building plans submitted by him to comply with certain objections raised by the D.D.A. On a report by Shri Sharma, an Inspector of Anti-Corruption Establishment, accompanied him to the D.D.A office, with two panch witnesses and on receiving a pre-arranged signal, entered the room and challenged the accused who was stunned and kept mum. Then three pre-marked ten rupees notes were found in the file dealing with Sharma's matter, the file was found under the

table and the accused had his foot on it. The panch witnesses did not fully support the prosecution case. They resiled from their earlier statements made in the course of investigation were treated as hostile by the prosecution, and were disbelieved by the Court. The accused was duly tried, convicted and sentenced, and the conviction was upheld by the High Court.

It was contended that the uncorroborated testimony of a trap witness was not sufficient to found the conviction? and also that the evidence relating to the conduct of the accused when challenged by the police inspector was excluded by s. 162 Cr. P.C. 1974 and was inadmissible in evidence.

Dismissing the appeal, the Court

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HELD: (1) We are unable to agree that no conviction can ever be based on the uncorroborated testimony of a "trap witness". Where the circumstance justify it, a court may refuse to act upon the uncorroborated testimony of a trap witness. On the other hand a court may well be justified in acting upon the uncorroborated testimony of a trap witness, if the court is satisfied from the facts and circumstances of the case that the trap witness is a witness of truth. [334C-E]

The State of Bihar v. Basawan Singh, AIR 1958 SC

500, and Bhanuprasad Hariprasad Dave & Anr. v. The State of Gujarat, AIR 1968 SC 1323, applied.

Ram Prakash Arora v. The State of Punjab, AIR 1973

SC 498 and Darshan Lal v. The Delhi Administration, AIR 1974 SC, 218; differentiated.

2. The conduct of a person against whom an offence is alleged, is admissible under s.8 of the Evidence Act. What is excluded by s.162 Cr. P.C is the

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Statement made to a police officer in the course of investigation and not the evidence relating to the conduct of an accused person (not amounting to a statement) when confronted or questioned by a police officer, during the course of an investigation. [336G-H, 337A]

D. V. Narasimhan v. State, AIR 1969 A.P. 271, held inapplicable.

Himachal Pradesh Administration v. Om Prakash, AIR 1972 SC 975 and Zinglee Ariel v. State of M.P., AIR 1954 SC 15; reaffirmed.

Rao Shiv Bahadur Singh & Anr. v. State of Vindhya Pradesh, AIR 1954 SC 322 and State of Madras v. A. Vaidyanatha Iyer, AIR 1958 SC 61, applied.

JUDGMENT:

CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION: Criminal Appeal No. 193 of 1974.

Appeal by Special Leave from the Judgment and order dated 1-3-1974 of The Delhi High Court in Criminal Appeal No. 119/72.

Frank Anthony, N. S. Das Bahl and Shushil Kumar for the appellant.

E. C. Agarwala and R. M. Sachthey for the Respondent. ii The Judgment of the Court was delivered by CHINNAPPA REDDY, J.-The appellant before us was convicted by the learned Special Judge, Delhi of an offence under Section 5(1) (d) read with Section 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act and Section 161 Indian Penal Code, and sentenced to suffer rigorous imprisonment for a period of one year on each count. He was also sentenced to pay a fine of Rs. 100/-. The conviction and sentence were confirmed by the High Court and the appellant has come up in appeal by special leave. The prosecution case briefly was as follows:

P.W. 6 Ram Niwas Sharma, an Architect by profession prepared building plans for one M.L. Batla and submitted them to the Delhi Development Authority for sanction. The plans were submitted on 6th May, 1969. They were rejected on 26th May, 1969. Revised plans were thereafter submitted on 16th June, 1969. Certain objections were raised and in order to comply with those objections P.W.6 went to the office of the Delhi Development Authority on 11-7-1969. He met the accused who was overseer-Section officer and asked him to be permitted to make necessary corrections in the building plans. Instead of giving the file to P.W.6 the accused demanded a sum of Rs. 30/- as bribe. P.W.6 told him that he did not have the money with him whereupon the accused asked him to come on 14th July, 1969, in the afternoon with the money. On 14th July, 1969. P.W.6 went to the AntiCorruption office at about 12 noon and gave a report Ex. P.W.1/A to P.W.9, an Inspector of the Anti-Corruption Establishment. P.W.9 sent for P.Ws. 1 and 2 from the Sales Tax office. The report made by P.W.6 was read over to them. Thereafter, P.W.6 produced three ten rupee notes, the numbers of which were noted by P.W.9 in the presence of the Panch witnesses P.Ws. 1 and 2. Thereafter it was arranged that they should all proceed to the office of the Delhi Development Authority. There P.W. 5 was to give the bribe to the accused and on his giving the bribe to the accused, P.W. 1 was to give a signal to P.W. 9. As arranged P.W.6 went to the office of the Delhi Development Authority alongwith Panch witnesses. The Inspector stopped at the door of the room. P.W.6 went to the table of the accused and asked him for the file for the purpose of making necessary corrections in the building plans. The accused asked him if he has brought the money. On his saying 'yes' the file was taken out and given to P.W. 6. As there were a number of other files on the table the accused, P.W. 6 took the file to another table at a distance of one or two paces from the table of the accused. After making the corrections P.W. 6 handed over the file to the accused alongwith Rs. 30/-. Instead of taking the money the accused asked P.W. 6 to place the money in the file which he accordingly did. The accused then took the file and placed it under the table, putting his foot on it. At that stage P.W. 1 gave the agreed signal. P.W. 9 came to the room, disclosed his identity to the accused and questioned him whether he had accepted Rs. 30/- from P.W. 6. The accused was stunned and kept mum. P.W. 9 was then informed by P.W. 6 and the two panch witness that the money was kept in the file under the foot of the accused. P.W. 9 then took out the file and found the sum of Rs. 30/- in the file. The numbers of the currency notes were compared with the numbers earlier noted at the Anti Corruption office. Thereafter, P.W. 9 sent the raid report. On receipt of it, P.W. 7, Deputy Superintendent of Police took over the investigation. After completing

the investigation, a charge-sheet was laid and the accused was duly tried, convicted and sentenced as aforesaid.

The defence of the accused was that P.W. 6 met him on 11th July, 1969 and. wanted to make some corrections. He told him that he should file the original sale deed. P.W. 6 then said that he should come on Monday with the original sale deed. On 14th July 1969, P.W. 6 came to his office and wanted the file for making the necessary. corrections. He took out the file and gave it to P.W 6. P.W. 6 took the file to another table and brought it back to him after Or 3 minutes. According to the accused, P.W. 6 must have put the money into the file when he had taken the file to the other table. When the Police officer came in and questioned him about the receipt of the bribe his straight away told him that he had not taken any money from P.W. 6. According to the accused, P.W. 6 was annoyed with him on 11th July, 1969, as he thought that he (accused) was delaying his work. He also stated that Mr. Batla the owner of the plot had threatened him with dire consequences because he had raised objections to the plans submitted by him.

Both the Panch witnesses examined by the prosecution did not fully support the prosecution case. They resiled from the earlier statement made by them during the course of investigation. P.W. 1 stated that when P.W. 6 went into the room where the accused was working there was some talk between P.W. 6 and the accused but he did not hear what it was. He saw the accused taking out the file from the Almirah and giving it to P.W. 6. P.W. 6 took it to another table and was writing something in the file. Then he took back the file to the accused. The accused was busy with his own work. The complainant placed three ten Rupee notes in the file and handed over the file to the accused who placed it under the table near his feet. P.W.6 signalled to him and he gave the agreed signal. The Inspector then entered the room and questioned the accused about the receipt of the bribe. The accused denied the charge. He (P.W.1) then informed the Inspector that the money was in the file. The money was recovered from the file. The prosecution was permitted to cross-examine him. In cross-examination his earlier statements to the Investigating officer were put to him. He admitted in cross-examination that when questioned by the Inspector the accused kept silent for some time as he was perplexed but thereafter told the Inspector that he had not taken any money. The evidence of the other witness P.W. 2 was on the same lines as P.W. 1 except that he stated that when questioned by the Inspector the accused kept mum and was perplexed. P.W. 2 was also cross-examined by the prosecution and the statements made by him to the Investigating officer were put to him.

Shri Frank Anthony learned Counsel for the appellant submitted that the conviction was based on the uncorroborated testimony of P.W. 6 and that it should, therefore, be quashed. He urged that Batla, Advocate who had employed P.W.6 as an Architect had been convicted in a Criminal case and that the present complaint was inspired by Batla who had previously threatened the accused with direct consequences. He pointed out that P.Ws. 1 and 2 stated in their evidence that Batla was actually present in the Anti Corruption office when they were called there by the Inspector. He invited our attention to the circumstance that some persons were standing near the table of the accused at the time when the bribe was supposed to have been given and argued that it was most unlikely that the accused would have demanded and accepted the bribe when so many people were nearby. 'the learned Counsel further urged that the evidence of P.W.6 that he went to the office of

the D.D.A. at 3 or 3.15 p.m. On 11th July, 1969 could not be true as the noting on the file showed that the file was received at 4.45 p.m. It was also contended that the lower Courts had erred in law in relying upon the statements made by P.Ws. 1 and 2 to the Police. It was argued that the evidence of P.Ws. 1 and 2 rendered the evidence of P.W.6 entirely unacceptable. It was further contended that the lower Courts were wrong in treating the conduct of the accused when questioned by the Police officer as a circumstance against him.

We are unable to agree with the submission of Shri Anthony that no conviction can ever be based on the uncorroborated testimony of a person in the position of P.W.6 who, for the sake of felicity may be described as a "trap witness". That a trap witness may perhaps be considered as a person interested in the success of the trap may entitle a Court to view his evidence as that of an interested witness. Where the circumstances justify it, a Court may refuse to act upon the uncorroborated testimony of a trap witness. On the other hand a Court may well be justified in acting upon the uncorroborated testimony of a trap witness if the Court is satisfied from the facts and circumstances of the case that the witness is a witness of truth. Shri Anthony referred us to the decisions of this Court in *Ram Prakash Arora v. The State of Punjab*,⁽¹⁾ and *Darshan Lal v. The Delhi Administration*.⁽³⁾ In the first case Grover, J., observed as follows:

"It must be remembered that both Joginder Singh and Dalbir Singh P.Ws. were interested and partisan witnesses. They were concerned in the success of the trap and their evidence must be tested in the same way as that of any other interested witness and in a proper case the court may look for independent corroboration before convicting the accused person".

All that Grover J., said was that in an appropriate case corroboration may be sought and not that corroboration should invariably be sought. In the particular case it was found that the witnesses could not be implicitly relied upon and, therefore, corroboration was necessary. In the second case a string of circumstances was noticed which made it necessary that evidence of the witnesses who had laid the trap should not be acted upon without independent corroboration. This (1) A.I.R. 1973 S.C. 498.

(2) A.I.R. 1974 S.C. 218.

decision also does not lay down that the uncorroborated testimony of a trap witness can never be acted upon. That the law did not require any such corroboration was laid down in *The State of Bihar v. Basawan Singh*⁽¹⁾, and *Bhanuprasad Hariprasad Dave and Anr v. The State of Gujrat* (2). In Bhanuprasad's case it was observed by Hegde J., as follows: (at p. 1326):

"Now coming back to the contention that the appellants could not have been convicted solely on the basis of the evidence of Ramanlal and the police witnesses, we are of opinion that it is an untenable contention. The utmost that can be said against Ramanlal, the Dy. S.P., Erulker and Santramji is that they are partisan witnesses as they were interested in the success of the trap laid by them. It cannot be said and it was not said that they were accomplices. Therefore the law does not require that their

evidence should be corroborated before being accepted as sufficient to found a conviction".

We have carefully gone through the evidence of P.W. 6.

After perusing the evidence of P.W. 6 we are left with the impression that P.W. 6 is a truthful witness, an impression which we share with the High Court, the final Court of fact. He has given evidence in a straight forward manner and was unshaken in cross-examination. We are unable to discover any reason to discredit his testimony. The suggestion which was made to him was that he was aggrieved with the accused as he thought that he was unnecessarily raising objections, That he had a hot altercation with him and that he went to the Anti-Corruption office with the help of Shri Batla. The suggestions are without substance. P.Ws. 1 and 2 no doubt stated that Shri Batla was present in the Anti-Corruption office when they were called there by P.W. 9, the Inspector. We do not have the slightest doubt that P.Ws. 1 and 2 are not truthful witnesses and that they have given evidence in order to accommodate the accused. Their evidence on important particulars was contradicted by their earlier statements to the Police. Here we may refer to the grievance of Shri Anthony that the Trial Judge and the High Court treated the statements made by P.Ws. 1 and 2 to the Police as substantive evidence. There is no justification for the grievance. The witnesses, who were treated as hostile by the Prosecution were confronted with their earlier statements to the Police and their evidence was rejected as it was contradicted by their earlier statements. Such use of the statements (1) A.I.R. 1958 S.C. 500.

(2) A.I.R. 1968 S.C. 1323.

is premissible under s. 155 of the Evidence Act and the proviso to S. 162(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure read with S. 145, Evidence Act.

Corroboration to the evidence of P.W. 6, if considered necessary, may be found in the following circumstances: First, his evidence is corroborated by the report Exh. PW. 1/A which he gave to P.W. 9 that day. Second, his evidence is corroborated by the conduct of the accused when he was questioned by P.W. 9. P.W. 6 stated that when P.W. 9 entered the room and questioned the accused whether he had accepted Rs. 30/- from him, the accused was stunned and did not reply. P.W. 9 also stated that the accused kept mum when challenged. P.W. 2 stated that the accused did not reply and kept mum but added that the accused was perplexed. Though P.W. 1 first stated in his chief examination that the accused, when questioned denied having received any bribe, later he reluctantly admitted in cross-examination that the accused kept silent for some time as he was perplexed and then denied that he had received any bribe. The immediate reaction of the accused on being questioned by P.W. 9 is a circumstance which corroborates the testimony of P.W. 6. another a circumstance which corroborates the testimony of P.W. 6 is that the accused was ready with the file and handed it over to P.W. 6 as soon as he asked for it, indicating thereby that the statement of P.W. 6 that the accused had asked him to come on the afternoon of 14th July, 1969, was true. Yet another important circumstance which corroborates the evidence of P.W. 6 is that after P.W. 6 handed over the file to the accused he kept it under the table.

It was contended by the learned Counsel for the appellant that the evidence relating to the conduct of the accused when challenged by the Inspector was inadmissible as it was hit by Section 167 Criminal Procedure Code. He relied on a decision of the Andhra Pradesh High Court in *D. V. Narasimhan v. State*.⁽¹⁾ We do not agree with the submissions of Shri Anthony. There is a clear distinction between The conduct of a person against whom an offence is alleged, which is admissible under Section 8 of the Evidence Act, if such conduct is influenced by any fact in issue or relevant fact and the statement made to a Police officer in the course of an investigating which is hit by Section 162 Criminal Procedure Code. What is excluded by Section 162 Criminal Procedure Code is the statement made to a Police officer in the course of investigation and not the evidence relating to the conduct of an accused person (not amounting to a statement) when confronted or questioned by a Police officer during (1) A.I.R.. 1969 A.P. 271.

the course of an investigation. For example, the evidence of the circumstance, simpliciter, that an accused person led a Police officer and pointed out the place where stolen articles or weapons which might have been used in the commission of the offence were found hidden, would be admissible as conduct, under Section 8 of the Evidence Act, irrespective of whether any statement by the accused contemporaneously with or antecedent to such conduct falls within the purview of Section 27 of the Evidence Act [vide *Himachal Pradesh Administration v. Om Prakash*]⁽¹⁾.

The decision of the Andhra Pradesh High Court on which Shri Anthony placed reliance does not support his contention. 'where the learned Judges were not prepared to go into the question whether the evidence relating to the conduct of the accused was admissible as that question did not directly arise for consideration. On the other hand in *Zwinglee Ariel v. State of Madhya Pradesh*⁽²⁾, this Court appeared to be inclined to hold that evidence to the effect that the accused started trembling and showed signs of being frightened on being; questioned by the Police officer, if proved, was admissible, and, in *Rao Shiv Bahadur Singh and Anr. v. State of Vindhya Pradesh*⁽³⁾, and, *State of Madras v. A. Vaidyanatha Iyer*⁽⁴⁾, this Court actually relied on evidence relating to the conduct on the accused on being confronted by the Police officer with the allegation that he 'had received a bribe. In *Rao Shiv Bahadur Singh* case the evidence relating to conduct on which reliance was placed was to the effect that the accused was confused and could furnish no explanation when questioned by the Police officer. In *Vaidyanatha Iyer's* case also evidence to the effect that the accused was seen trembling and that he silently produced the notes from the folds of his dhoti was acted upon. We, therefore, do not see any reason to rule out the evidence relating to the conduct of the accused, which lends circumstantial assurance to the testimony of P.W. 6.

On a consideration of the entire evidence we are satisfied that the appellant was rightly convicted. The other points mentioned by Shri Anthony are of a minor character and do not warrant any interference under Article 136 of the Constitution. The appeal is accordingly dismissed.

M.R.

Appeal dismissed.

(1) A.I.R.. 1972 S.C. 975.

(2) A.I.R. 1954 S.C. 15.

(3) A.I.R. 1954 S.C. 322.

(4) A.I.R. 1958 S.C. 61.

