

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION

CRIMINAL APPEAL NO. 1356 OF 2022

The State of Madhya Pradesh

...Appellant(s)

Versus

Nandu @ Nandua

...Respondent(s)

J U D G M E N T

M.R. SHAH, J.

1. Feeling aggrieved and dissatisfied with the impugned judgment and order passed by the High Court of Madhya Pradesh at Jabalpur in Criminal Appeal No. 219 of 1995 by which the High Court has partly allowed the said appeal preferred by the respondent - accused – Nandu @ Nandua and has reduced the sentence from life imprisonment to the sentence already undertone while maintaining his conviction for the offences under Sections 147, 148, 323 and 302/34 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the State has preferred the present appeal.

2. We have heard Ms. Ankita Chaudhary, learned Deputy Advocate General appearing on behalf of the appellant - State.

3. At the outset, it is required to be noted that the learned Trial Court convicted the respondent - accused alongwith other accused for the offence punishable under Sections 147, 148, 323 and 302/34 of the IPC and sentenced him to undergo life imprisonment. However, by the impugned judgment and order, though the High Court has maintained the conviction of the accused for the offence under Sections 147, 148, 323 and 302/34 of the IPC by giving benefit of right to private defence, the High Court has thereafter interfered with the sentence and reduced the same to the already undergone by him. At this stage, it is required to be noted that by the time, the High Court passed the impugned judgment and order reducing the sentence, the period of sentence undergone by the respondent - accused was approximately seven years and ten months.

4. Ms. Ankita Chaudhary, learned Deputy Advocate General appearing on behalf of the State has vehemently submitted that when the High Court has maintained the conviction of the accused for the offence punishable under Section 302 IPC, the punishment which can be imposed would be punishment with death or imprisonment for life and also fine, but in any case, it shall not be less than the imprisonment for life.

4.1 It is vehemently submitted that once an accused is held to be guilty for the offence punishable under Section 302 IPC, the minimum sentence, which is imposable would be the imprisonment for life and, therefore, any punishment/sentence less than the imprisonment for life shall be contrary to Section 302 of the IPC. It is submitted that therefore the High Court has committed a very serious error in reducing the sentence to already undergone (seven years and ten months).

5. Having heard the learned counsel appearing on behalf of the State and considering the impugned judgment and order passed by the High Court by which though the High Court has maintained the conviction of the respondent - accused for the offence under Section 302 IPC, but the High Court has reduced the sentence to already undergone, i.e., seven years and ten months, we are of the firm view that the same is impermissible and unsustainable. The punishment for murder under Section 302 IPC shall be death or imprisonment for life and fine. Therefore, the minimum sentence provided for the offence punishable under Section 302 IPC would be imprisonment for life and fine. There cannot be any sentence/punishment less than imprisonment for life, if an accused is convicted for the offence punishable under Section 302 IPC. Any punishment less than the imprisonment for life for the offence punishable under Section 302 would be contrary to Section 302 IPC. By

the impugned judgment and order though the High Court has specifically maintained the conviction of the accused for the offence under Sections 147, 148, 323 and 302/34 of the IPC, but the High Court has reduced the sentence to sentence already undergone which is less than imprisonment for life, which shall be contrary to Section 302 IPC and is unsustainable.

6. In view of the above and for the reasons stated above, present appeal succeeds. The impugned judgment and order passed by the High Court reducing the sentence of the respondent – accused to the sentence already undergone while maintaining the conviction of the respondent – accused for the offence under Sections 147, 148, 323 and 302/34 of the IPC is hereby quashed and set aside. The judgment and order passed by the learned Trial Court imposing the life imprisonment is hereby restored. Now, the respondent – accused to be arrested and to undergo life imprisonment for which we give eight weeks' time to the accused to surrender before the concerned Court/Jail Authority.

.....J.
[M.R. SHAH]

NEW DELHI;
SEPTEMBER 02, 2022.

.....J.
[KRISHNA MURARI]