



THE HIGH COURT OF ORISSA AT CUTTACK

CRLMC No. 2565 of 2023

(In the matter of an application under Sections 482 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973)

Bidyabharati Panda Petitioner

-Versus-

State of Odisha and another Opp. Parties

For the petitioner : Mr. Bishnu Prasad Pradhan, Advocate

For the Opposite Parties : Mr. U.R. Jena, AGA
Mr. Partha Sarathi Nayak, Advocate
for Opposite Party No.2

CORAM:

THE HONOURABLE SHRI JUSTICE SIBO SANKAR MISHRA

Date of Hearing: 17.04.2025 : : Date of Judgment: 03.07.2025

S.S. Mishra, J. The petitioner, has invoked the jurisdiction of this Court under section 482 Cr.P.C seeking quashing of the order of cognizance dated 12.04.2023 taken by learned S.D.J.M, Paralakhemundi in 1.C.C. Case No.22 of 2022 U/s.302 and 120-B of the Indian Penal Code. The petitioner prays that such complaint case against her is not maintainable



prima facie as she is already facing trial for the same offence U/s.285 and 304-A of IPC.

2. The facts of the case, as presented, are double-faced and offer sharply divergent narratives. For the convenience of appreciation, both versions are presented separately and explored bereft of unnecessary detail, yet with sufficient clarity to understand the competing standpoints.

Version of the Accused-Petitioner (Wife of the deceased)

According to the accused-petitioner, who is the wife of the deceased Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF), Soumya Ranjan Mohapatra, the incident in question was purely accidental. On 12.07.2021, while the deceased was engaged in burning certain discarded or irrelevant household articles inside the official residence allotted to him, he allegedly used kerosene as an accelerant. While doing so, he inadvertently suffered a massive burn injury.

The petitioner submits that upon witnessing the incident, she was deeply shocked and immediately raised an alarm, following which local neighbours, forest department staff, and others from the nearby residential quarters rushed to the spot. With their assistance, the



deceased was promptly transported to the nearest hospital that is DHH, Parlakemundi for treatment where his dying declaration was recorded and later referred to SCBMCH, Cuttack and subsequently to Aswini Hospital, Cuttack for emergency treatment. Despite the medical attention, the burn injuries proved fatal, and the deceased eventually succumbed after a brief period of hospitalization.

It is the case of the petitioner that the entire incident was accidental, devoid of any foul play, and that she herself was traumatized and helpless during the sequence of events. She further alleges that false and motivated allegations were subsequently made by the informant (the father of the deceased), driven by misunderstanding and family discord. The petitioner maintains that the initial investigation by the police, which culminated in a final report and charge sheet under Sections 285 and 304-A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), was based on a proper appreciation of the available evidence and medical records. She asserts that there is no credible material to support any allegation of homicide/death, let alone conspiracy to murder.



Version of the Informant (Father of the Deceased)

In stark contrast to the narrative of the petitioner, the informant, who is the father of the deceased ACF, contends that his son was deliberately killed, and the incident was a pre-planned homicidal act, disguised as an accident. According to him, the deceased was in the prime of his life, professionally well-placed, and had a turbulent marital relationship with the accused-petitioner. He alleges that due to persistent domestic tension, disputes relating to financial matters, and alleged interference by the wife's family in the personal and professional life of the deceased, the marriage had become strained.

The informant claims that on the date of the incident, he was neither informed immediately nor allowed to interact freely with his son during his hospitalization. The version about accidental burning, according to him, is an afterthought concocted by the accused, and he questions why his son, a forest officer well-versed in fire safety, would burn materials using kerosene in such a hazardous manner without assistance.



He further points out several suspicious and incriminating circumstances which were ignored while filing of the Final Form in the earlier case. The informant (in this case the complainant) was agonized by removal of the names of the suspected DFO and the Cook, who may have done the act in connivance with the wife of the deceased.

Based on these factors, the informant was dissatisfied with the police investigation, which in his view was superficial and lacked depth, particularly on aspects relating to motive, conspiracy, and role of the accused persons. He consequently filed a detailed protest petition before the learned Magistrate, enclosing supplementary materials, including witness affidavits, medical reports, and photographs of the scene, and prayed for either further investigation under Section 173(8) CrPC or for independent cognizance of offences under Section 302 read with Section 120-B IPC.

The protest petition, though captioned as one seeking further investigation, contained a narrative of the offence, description of the accused persons, list of proposed witnesses, and prayer for summoning them. Upon consideration, the learned Magistrate treated the protest



petition as a complaint within the meaning of Section 2(d) CrPC, and invoking the procedure under Sections 200 and 202 CrPC, recorded preliminary satisfaction that a *prima facie* case of murder and conspiracy was made out.

Thereafter, the learned Magistrate proceeded to take cognizance under Sections 302 and 120-B IPC, and directed issuance of process against the present petitioner and other co-accused. This order of cognizance and issuance of process forms the subject matter of challenge in the present petition under Section 482 CrPC.

3. Heard Mr. Bishnu Prasad Pradhan, learned counsel for the petitioner, Mr. U.R. Jena, learned AGA for the State and Mr. Partha Sarathi Nayak, learned counsel for the Opposite Party No.2.

Submissions of the Petitioner

4. The learned counsel for the petitioner contends that such cognizance is impermissible in law, particularly when the Magistrate had already taken cognizance based on the police charge sheet under Sections 285 and 304-A IPC, and thus this result in a second cognizance on the same facts, which is legally unsustainable. It is submitted that the



learned Magistrate erred in treating a protest petition filed under Section 173(8) CrPC as a complaint under Section 200 CrPC and, without ordering further investigation or referring the matter to the police, straightaway took cognizance under Sections 302 and 120-B IPC. Such a course of action amounts to an abuse of process and is in violation of Rule 20 of the General Rules and Circular Orders (Criminal), which mandates that a protest petition arising out of a final report can only be treated as a complaint if it discloses a *prima facie* case and is supported by examination of the complainant and witnesses.

5. It is further submitted that the Magistrate's action in registering a second criminal proceeding in the form of ICC Case No.22/2022 is impermissible under law when cognizance has already been taken in G.R. Case No.334/2021 arising out of the same incident. The same set of allegations cannot result in parallel proceedings. The decision of the Magistrate, therefore, violates the doctrine of double jeopardy and offends settled principles laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in



cases such as *T.T. Antony v. State of Kerala*¹ and *Amitbhai Anil Chandra Shah v. CBI*².

The petitioner's counsel submitted that the investigation in the instant case was conducted by a Special Investigation Team of CID, CB comprising nine senior officers, and involved detailed analysis of medical reports, post-mortem findings, scientific evidence, polygraph test results, and statements of 71 witnesses under Section 161 CrPC. Upon thorough investigation, no material was found to suggest a case of murder or conspiracy, and the charge sheet was rightly submitted under Sections 285 and 304-A IPC.

It is thus submitted that the ingredients of Sections 302 or 120-B IPC are wholly absent, and the conclusion drawn by the Magistrate is unsupported by either the complaint petition or the material produced during the inquiry. The earlier cognizance under Sections 285/304-A IPC based on CID's findings negates the basis for any subsequent

¹ 2001 (6) SCC 181

² 2013 (6) SCC 348



cognizance under Section 302/120-B IPC, especially in the absence of any new evidence or circumstances.

6. Accordingly, the learned counsel for the petitioner prays for quashing of the impugned cognizance order dated 12.04.2023 passed in 1CC Case No.22/2022 on the grounds that it is not only illegal and contrary to law, but also an abuse of the process of court.

Submissions of the opposite party No.2

7. The learned counsel for the opposite party No.2 submitted that even though an FIR was lodged against Sangram Keshari Behera, Bidya Bharati Panda and Manmath Kumbha for the offences under Section 302 IPC, the charge sheet was filed only against Bidya Bharati Panda for offences under Sections 285/304-A IPC. Sangram Keshari Behera and Manmath Kumbha were not charge-sheeted and all three accused were discharged of the offence under Section 302 IPC. After the learned Magistrate accepted the charge sheet, the informant filed a protest petition which was registered as a complaint, following which the Magistrate undertook enquiry under Section 202 CrPC and issued process under Section 204 CrPC.



8. The learned counsel for the opposite party No.2 contended that the issue of taking cognizance based on a complaint or protest petition filed after acceptance of charge sheet or final report is settled law, there is no more *Res Integra*. Reference is made to **Zunaid Vs State of U.P and Ors.**³, where the Hon'ble Supreme Court held thus:

“11. It may be noted that even in a case where the final report of the police under Section 173 is accepted and the accused persons are discharged, the Magistrate has the power to take cognizance of the offence on a complaint or a protest petition on the same or similar allegations even after the acceptance of the final report. As held by this Court in Gopal Vijay Verma v. Bhuneshwar Prasad Sinha [Gopal Vijay Verma v. Bhuneshwar Prasad Sinha, (1982) 3 SCC 510 : 1983 SCC (Cri) 110] , as followed in B. Chandrika v. Santhosh [B. Chandrika v. Santhosh, (2014) 13 SCC 699 : (2014) 5 SCC (Cri) 800] , a Magistrate is not debarred from taking cognizance of a complaint merely on the ground that earlier he had declined to take cognizance of the police report. No doubt a Magistrate while exercising his judicial discretion has to apply his mind to the contents of the protest petition or the complaint as the case may be. ”

Learned counsel for the opposite party No.2 submitted that the Magistrate is not required to record detailed reasons for taking

³ (2023) 14 SCC 576



cognizance and issuing process under Section 204 CrPC. However, if the Magistrate decides to reject the complaint, reasons must be assigned.

9. Learned counsel for the opposite party No.2 further contended that contrary to petitioner's arguments, there are ample materials on record to *prima facie* suggest that the death was homicidal in nature and that the petitioner is responsible for it. The following circumstances looming large on record, which reasoned for taking cognizance of the offences as mentioned above:

- a) The informant consistently alleged in FIR, 161 CrPC statement, protest petition and initial statement under Section 200 CrPC about the deceased's complaints regarding illicit relationship between his wife (Bidya Bharati Panda) and Sangram Keshari Behera, and threats when confronted.
- b) The deceased received 95% burn injuries but the spot had no burnt materials except some burnt scrap papers. A bottle containing 200 ml kerosene with cap closed was found at the spot, however, body of the deceased was completely burned.



- c) The charge sheet established animosity between deceased and his wife, which could be the motive of the alleged crime.
- d) Witness statements recorded under Section 202 CrPC point towards petitioners' involvement.
- e) Discrepancies in statements of Bidyabharati Panda recorded by Police at different stages regarding how deceased caught fire.
- f) Since crime occurred at deceased's residence, onus is on accused wife to explain how husband caught fire with no third person present.
- g) Post incidental conduct of accused wife in not arranging hospital treatment and not accompanying injured husband raises suspicion.

The learned counsel for the opposite party No.2 placed his reliance on **Kewal Krishan v. Suraj Bhan and Anr.**⁴ regarding standard of scrutiny at the stage of Magistrate taking cognizance and issuing summons U/s. 204 Cr.P.C., which reads as under:

⁴ 1980 (Supp) SCC 499



".... At the stage of Sections 203 and 204 of the Criminal Procedure Code in a case exclusively triable by the Court of Session, all that the Magistrate has to do is to see whether on a cursory perusal of the complaint and the evidence recorded during the preliminary inquiry under Sections 200 and 202 of the Criminal Procedure Code, there is prima facie evidence in support of the charge levelled against the accused. All that he has to see is whether or not there is "sufficient ground for proceeding" against the accused. At this stage, the Magistrate is not to weigh the evidence meticulously as if he were the trial court..."

10. Learned counsel for the opposite party No.2 submitted that CrPC contains no express provision for protest petition, which is a judicial creation. The Supreme Court has held through various decisions that there is no particular form for protest petition, but to be considered as complaint, it must satisfy required definition of "Complaint" as provided under Section 2(d) CrPC.

11. Learned counsel for the opposite party No.2 further submitted that the protest petition in the instant case contains witness list, clearly states allegations, and points out un-investigated evidence, thus satisfying the requirements of complaint under Section 2(d) Cr.P.C. The principle of "Substance over form" should govern, preventing courts from being



swayed by mere appearance but delving deeper to find substance and give effect to it.

Observations and Conclusion

12. Upon careful consideration of the submissions made by both parties and perusal of the material on record, this Court observes that the present case involves competing narratives regarding the same incident, with the petitioner claiming it to be accidental and the informant alleging it to be a case of murder by conspiracy. The fundamental question that arises is whether the learned Magistrate was justified in taking cognizance under Sections 302 and 120-B IPC when cognizance had already been taken under Sections 285 and 304-A IPC based on the police charge sheet. It is noted that while the petitioner's counsel has raised the issue of double jeopardy and multiple proceedings arising from the same facts, the law is well-settled that a Magistrate is not precluded from taking cognizance on a complaint even after accepting a final report, provided there is *prima facie* material to support the allegations. The Supreme Court's pronouncement in ***Zunaid v. State of***



U.P. (supra) clearly establishes this principle, and the mere fact that an earlier cognizance was taken under different sections does not automatically bar subsequent cognizance under more serious provisions if supported by material.

13. However, this Court is also mindful of the fact that the power to take cognizance on a complaint after accepting a final report must be exercised judiciously and not mechanically. The Magistrate must apply his mind to determine whether the complaint discloses *prima facie* case different from or additional to what was investigated by the police. In the present case, the informant has alleged that certain aspects, including the role of co-accused persons and the element of conspiracy, were not adequately investigated, and has produced additional material in support of his allegations.

14. This Court further observes that the investigation in the present case was conducted by a Special Investigation Team comprising nine senior officers, and involved examination of 71 witnesses, medical reports, scientific evidence, and other materials. The fact that such an



exhaustive investigation resulted in a charge sheet under Sections 285/304-A IPC rather than Section 302 IPC cannot be lightly brushed aside. However, at the same time, the informant's right to seek justice through the mechanism of complaint cannot be denied if he is able to demonstrate *prima facie* case based on materials not considered earlier.

15. Being dissatisfied with the investigation of the investigating agency the informant had right to file protest petition/complaint, which the informant under the law has duly exercised. The informant has filed an exhaustive complaint succinctly narrating the facts and evidence thereto and also highlighted the investigation which has been conducted in a perfunctory manner. After enumerating a detail chronology of events the informant in the protest petition has also culled out the grounds on which the court should take cognizance of. In the heading of the “ground” the informant has highlighted the perfunctory investigation as well as highlighted the inconsistencies in the charge-sheet filed by the police. In support of the contentions raised by him in the protest petition, the informant has led pre-summoning evidences of as many as



three witnesses besides examining himself. For sake of brevity, detailed narration of the contents of protest petition and initial statement are avoided in the judgement but suffice to say that the informant has adequately led the evidence to bring *prima facie* case against the petitioner for alleged offence U/s.302 and 120-B of the IPC. The Court of SDJM vide the impugned order dated 12.04.2023 has taken cognizance. The reading of cognizance order would reveal that the trial court had arrived at a *prima facie* view while taking into consideration the averments in complaint petition, the statement of the complainant U/s.200 Cr.P.C., evidence recorded U/s.202 Cr.P.C. and other material available on record. The learned court below have also recorded that there is “sufficient material” on record to proceed against the accused person as *prima facie* case is well made out U/s.302 and 120-B of the IPC. Therefore, it can’t be said that the Trial Court has not applied its judicial mind while taking cognizance of offence. In the light of the aforementioned, the cognizance order can’t be questioned as law in the



matters is no more *res integra*. This Court in *M/s. Rashmi Cement Ltd.*

*V/s. State of Odisha*⁵ held thus:

“26. In summoning the accused, it is not necessary for the Magistrate to examine the merits and demerits of the case and whether the materials collected is adequate for supporting the conviction. The court is not required to evaluate the evidence and its merits. The standard to be adopted for summoning the accused under Section 204 of Cr.P.C. is not the same as at the time of framing the charge. For issuance of summons under Section 204 of Cr.P.C., the expression used is “there is sufficient ground for proceeding...”; whereas for framing the charges, the expression used in Sections 240 and 246 of I.P.C. is “there is ground for presuming that the accused has committed an offence...”. At the stage of taking cognizance of the offence based upon a police report and for issuance of summons under Section 204 of Cr.P.C., detailed enquiry regarding the merits and demerits of the case is not required. The fact that after investigation of the case, the police have filed charge-sheet along with the materials thereon may be considered as sufficient ground for proceeding for issuance of summons under Section 204 of Cr.P.C.”

16. In *Kanti Bhadra Shah v. State of West Bengal*⁶, the following passage held by the Hon’ble Supreme Court will be apposite in this context:-

“12. If there is no legal requirement that the trial court should write an order showing the reasons for framing a charge, why should the already burdened trial courts be

⁵ 2025 (I) ILR-CUT-1366

⁶ (2000) 1 SCC 722



further burdened with such an extra work. The time has reached to adopt all possible measures to expedite the court procedures and to chalk out measures to avert all roadblocks causing avoidable delays. If a Magistrate is to write detailed orders at different stages merely because the counsel would address arguments at all stages, the snail-paced progress of proceedings in trial courts would further be slowed down. We are coming across interlocutory orders of Magistrates and Sessions Judges running into several pages. We can appreciate if such a detailed order has been passed for culminating the proceedings before them. But it is quite unnecessary to write detailed orders at other stages, such as issuing process, remanding the accused to custody, framing of charges, passing over to next stages in the trial."

17. In *Nagawwa v. Veeranna Shivalingappa Konjalgi and Ors.*⁷, the Hon'ble Apex Court held that it is not the province of the Magistrate to enter into a detailed discussion on the merits or demerits of the case. It was further held that in deciding whether a process should be issued, the Magistrate can take into consideration the probabilities appearing on the face of the complaint or in the evidence led by the complainant in support of the allegations. The Magistrate has been given an undoubted discretion in the matter and the discretion has to be judicially exercised by him. It was further held that:

⁷ (1976) 3 SCC 736



“5. ... Once the Magistrate has exercised his discretion it is not for the High Court, or even this Court, to substitute its own discretion for that of the Magistrate or to examine the case on merits with a view to find out whether or not the allegations in the complaint, if proved, would ultimately end in conviction of the accused...”

18. Furthermore, in **Dy. Chief Controller of Imports & Exports v. Roshanlal Agarwal**⁸, the Hon’ble Supreme Court, in paragraph-9, has held as under: -

“9. In determining the question whether any process is to be issued or not, what the Magistrate has to be satisfied is whether there is sufficient ground for proceeding and not, whether there is sufficient ground for conviction. Whether the evidence is adequate for supporting the conviction, can be determined only at the trial and not at the stage of inquiry. At the stage of issuing the process to the accused, the Magistrate is not required to record reasons. This question was considered recently in U.P. Pollution Control Board v. Mohan Meakins Ltd. [(2000) 3 SCC 745] and after noticing the law laid down in Kanti Bhadra Shah v. State of W.B. [(2000) 1 SCC 722: 2000 SCC (Cri) 303] it was held as follows: (U.P. Pollution case [(2000) 3 SCC 745], SCC p. 749, para 6)

‘6. The legislature has stressed the need to record reasons in certain situations such as dismissal of a complaint without issuing process. There is no such legal requirement imposed on a Magistrate for passing detailed order while issuing summons. The process issued to accused cannot be

⁸ (2003) 4 SCC 139



quashed merely on the ground that the Magistrate had not passed a speaking order.”

19. In *U.P. Pollution Control Board v. Bhupendra Kumar Modi*⁹, the Hon’ble Supreme Court, held as under:

“It is settled legal position that at the stage of issuing process, the Magistrate is mainly concerned with the allegations made in the complaint or the evidence led in support of the same and he is only to be prima facie satisfied whether there are sufficient grounds for proceeding against the accused.”

20. This being the settled legal position, the order passed by the learned Magistrate could not be faulted with only on the ground that the summoning order was not a reasoned one.

21. It is, therefore, very well settled that at the stage of issuing process, the Magistrate is mainly concerned with the allegations made in the complaint or the evidence led in support of the same and the Magistrate is only to be satisfied that there are sufficient grounds for proceeding against the accused. It is fairly well settled that when issuing summons, the Magistrate need not explicitly state the reasons for his satisfaction that there are sufficient grounds for proceeding against the

⁹ (2009) 2 SCC 147



accused. Reliance in this regard can be placed on the Hon'ble Supreme Court's judgment in the case of **Bhushan Kumar v. State (NCT of Delhi)**¹⁰, wherein it was held as under :

“11. In Chief Enforcement Officer v. Videocon International Ltd. [Chief Enforcement Officer v. Videocon International Ltd., (2008) 2 SCC 492 : (2008) 1 SCC (Cri) 471] (SCC p. 499, para 19) the expression “cognizance” was explained by this Court as “it merely means ‘become aware of’ and when used with reference to a court or a Judge, it connotes ‘to take notice of judicially’. It indicates the point when a court or a Magistrate takes judicial notice of an offence with a view to initiating proceedings in respect of such offence said to have been committed by someone. It is entirely a different thing from initiation of proceedings; rather it is the condition precedent to the initiation of proceedings by the Magistrate or the Judge. Cognizance is taken of cases and not of persons. Under Section 190 of the Code, it is the application of judicial mind to the averments in the complaint that constitutes cognizance. At this stage, the Magistrate has to be satisfied whether there is sufficient ground for proceeding and not whether there is sufficient ground for conviction. Whether the evidence is adequate for supporting the conviction can be determined only at the trial and not at the stage of enquiry. If there is sufficient ground for proceeding then the Magistrate is empowered for issuance of process under Section 204 of the Code.

12. A summon is a process issued by a Court calling upon a person to appear before a Magistrate. It is used for the purpose of notifying an individual of his legal obligation to appear before the Magistrate as a response to violation of law. In other words, the summons will announce to the person to whom it is directed that a legal proceeding has been started against that person and the date and time on which the person must appear

¹⁰ (2012) 5 SCC 424



in Court. A person who is summoned is legally bound to appear before the Court on the given date and time. Willful disobedience is liable to be punished under Section 174 IPC. It is a ground for contempt of court.

13. Section 204 of the Code does not mandate the Magistrate to explicitly state the reasons for issuance of summons. It clearly states that if in the opinion of a Magistrate taking cognizance of an offence, there is sufficient ground for proceeding, then the summons may be issued. This section mandates the Magistrate to form an opinion as to whether there exists a sufficient ground for summons to be issued but it is nowhere mentioned in the section that the explicit narration of the same is mandatory, meaning thereby that it is not a pre-requisite for deciding the validity of the summons issued.”

22. The Court notes that the standard of scrutiny at the stage of taking cognizance under Section 204 CrPC is limited, as held in ***Kewal Krishan v. Suraj Bhan*** (supra), and the Magistrate is not required to conduct a mini-trial or weigh evidence meticulously. The question is whether there exists sufficient ground for proceeding against the accused, not whether the prosecution case would ultimately succeed.

23. While this Court acknowledges the submissions regarding Rule 20 of the General Rules and Circular Orders (Criminal) and the procedural requirements for treating a protest petition as a complaint, it is observed that substance must prevail over form. If the protest petition contains the essential ingredients of a complaint as defined under



Section 2(d) CrPC and discloses a *prima facie* case, the Magistrate's decision to treat it as such, cannot be faulted merely on technical grounds.

24. This Court is also conscious about the present petition under Section 482 CrPC seeking quashing of cognizance at a very preliminary stage. The inherent power under Section 482 CrPC should be exercised sparingly and only in exceptional circumstances where continuation of proceedings would amount to abuse of process or where no *prima facie* case is made out. The competing versions presented by both parties and the existence of disputed questions of fact make this an inappropriate case for not exercising such extraordinary jurisdiction at this stage, rather make it an inevitable case for trial to thrash out the disputed facts and test the competing version of the accused, informant and the prosecution.

25. In the light of the authorities cited and the above discussions and observations, this Court is very conscious of the fact that the present proceedings are still at the nascent stage of cognizance. The detailed



appreciation of evidence and consideration of the petitioner's defence can only take place during trial. Therefore, this Court is reluctant to give indulgence to the petitioner at this stage. However, non-interference by this Court at this stage shall not preclude the petitioner to resort to other procedural remedy, including the remedy of seeking discharge. The petitioner is at liberty to move appropriate application before the Trial Court in this regard. If such application is preferred by the petitioner, the Trial Court shall take into consideration all the grounds urged by her in the present petition on merits without being influenced by the observation made by this Court. The court below should deal with the application while taking into consideration, material formed part of the charge-sheet, the allegation made in the protest petition, pre-summoning evidence laid by the informant and also the case diary.

26. With the aforementioned observation, the CRLMC is disposed of.

(S.S. Mishra)
Judge

The High Court of Orissa, Cuttack
Dated the 3rd of July, 2025/ Swarna