

CRIMINAL REVISION.*Before Sharfuddin and Coxe JJ.***KARI SINGH***v.***EMPEROR.*****1912***Dec. 12.*

Defamation—Statement by accused made in application to District Magistrate for transfer of case—Absolute or qualified privilege—English law, applicability of, in the mofussil—Construction of Statutes—Penal Code (Act XLV of 1860) s. 499.

Section 499 of the Penal Code is exhaustive ; and if a defamatory statement does not fall within the specified Exceptions, it is not privileged.

The English common law doctrine of absolute privilege does not obtain in the mofussil in India.

A defamatory statement made in bad faith by an accused, against whom a trial is pending in a Criminal Court, and contained in a petition to the District Magistrate for a transfer of the case, is not absolutely privileged, but is punishable under s. 499 of the Penal Code.

Greene v. Delaney (1), *Augada Ram Shaha v. Nemaï Chand Shaha* (2) and *Kali Nath Gupta v. Gobind Chandra Basu* (3) followed.

Potaraju Venkata Reddy v. Emperor (4) dissented from.

Baboo Gurnesh Dutt Singh v. Mugneeram Chowdhry (5), *Bhikumler Singh v. Becharam Sircar* (6), *Woolfun Bibi v. Jesarat Sheikh* (7), *Golay Jan v. Bholanath Khettry* (8) distinguished.

Haïdar Ali v. Abru Mia (9) referred to.

Kari Singh v. Emperor (10) explained.

The proper course in construing an Act is to ascertain the natural meaning of its language, and not to assume that it was intended to leave the existing law unaltered, except when such intention is stated.

* Criminal Revision, No. 1509 of 1912, against the order of E. G. Drake-Brockman, Sessions Judge of Bhagalpore, dated May 27, 1912.

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| (1) (1870) 14 W. R. Cr. 27. | (6) (1888) I. L. R. 15 Calc. 264. |
| (2) (1896) I. L. R. 23 Calc. 867. | (7) (1899) I. L. R. 27 Calc. 262. |
| (3) (1900) 5 C. W. N. 293. | (8) (1911) I. L. R. 38 Calc. 880. |
| (4) (1912) 13 Cr. L. J. 275. | (9) (1905) I. L. R. 32 Calc. 756. |
| (5) (1872) 11 B. L. R. 321. | (10) See <i>post</i> , p. 411 (note). |

1912
 KARI SINGH
 v.
 EMPEROR.

Bank of England v. Vagliano (1) and *Norendra Nath Sircar v Kamalbasini Dasi* (2) followed.

The essence of a Code is to be exhaustive in the matters in respect of which it declares the law, and it is not the province of a Judge to disregard or go outside the letter of the enactment, according to its true construction.

Gokul Mandar v. Pudmanund Singh (3) followed.

ONE Punai Kundu, a servant of Macpherson, manager of the Bhagawan Factory of Monghyr, instituted a case of rioting against the petitioner and others, which was sent for trial to the Court of Moulvi Najimuddin, an Honorary Magistrate at Beguserai. During the pendency of the case the petitioner filed an application before the District Magistrate of Monghyr for transfer of the same, paragraph (5) of which was as follows :—

“(5) That on the 17th June last, on the date fixed for the hearing of this case, Mr. Macpherson and the manager of the Majhoul Kothi, where some properties of the trying Honorary Magistrate have been leased out, came to the Court of the trying Magistrate and had some private talk with the Honorary Magistrate, and the petitioner apprehends that the manager of the Majhoul Kothi was brought to put additional pressure on the trying Magistrate to induce him to convict the petitioner, and that he cannot get a fair and impartial trial in that Court, or in any other Court in Bengal.”

Macpherson, and Finch, the manager of the Majhoul Factory, thereupon lodged separate complaints, under s. 499 of the Penal Code, against the petitioner. The two cases were tried separately by J. E. Mackey, Deputy Magistrate of Monghyr, who convicted the petitioner in each case, on the 21st March, 1912, and sentenced him to a fine of Rs. 100. It was proved at the trial that neither Macpherson nor Finch went to Beguserai on the day in question. Appeals from the convictions and sentences were dismissed, on the 27th May, by the Sessions Judge of Monghyr. The petitioner thereupon moved the High Court against both

(1) [1891] A. C. 107.

(2) (1896) I. L. R. 23 Calc. 563.

(3) (1902) I. L. R. 29 Calc. 707.

orders, but a Rule was issued at first only in the case brought by Finch, the other application standing over pending the disposal of the Rule, which was made absolute on the 11th October, 1912 (1). The petitioner then obtained the present Rule with reference to the case in which Macpherson was the complainant.

1912
KARI SINGH
v.
EMPEROR.

Babu Amulya Charan Chatterjee, for the petitioner. Under the English law a witness or a party is absolutely privileged from a civil suit or a criminal prosecution: *Dawkins v. Rokeby* (2), *Royal Aquarium v. Parkinson* (3), *Munster v. Lamb* (4). In India the doctrine has also been applied: *Potaraian Venkata Reddy v. Emperor* (5), *Golap Jan v. Bholanath Khettry* (6), and see the dissenting judgment of Richards J. in *Emperor v. Ganga Prasad* (7). The Indian Codes are not exhaustive: see *In the matter of Stallmann* (8) and *Surendra Nath Banerjee v. Chief Justice* (9). The Criminal law of defamation contained in s. 499 of the Penal Code is imported from the English law on the subject. When the Code departs from such law, it does so in express and unambiguous terms. The exceptions to s. 499 correspond to the five classes of qualified privilege known to the law in England, and mentioned in Odgers' *Libel and Slander*, 5th ed. 242, Clerk and Lindsell 585, and Halsbury's *Laws of England*, Vol. XVIII, p. 677. The doctrine of absolute privilege is not referred to in the Penal Code, and the English rule has not been interfered with. Such an important doctrine cannot be taken away by implication: see *In the matter of Stallmann* (10). The remarks of Lord Herschell in *Bank of*

- (1) See *post*, p. 441 (note). (6) (1911) I. L. R. 38 Calc. 880, 888.
 (2) (1873) L. R. 8 Q. B. 255, 263. (7) (1907) I. L. R. 29 All. 685.
 (3) [1892] 1 Q. B. 431, 442, 446, 451. (8) (1911) I. L. R. 39 Calc. 164.
 (4) (1883) 11 Q. B. D. 588, 601, 606. (9) (1883) I. L. R. 10 Calc. 109.
 (5) (1912) 13 Cr. L. J. 275, 279. (10) (1911) I. L. R. 39 Calc. 164, 198.

1912
KARI SINGH
v.
EMPEROR.

England v. Vagliano (1) apply to codifications of existing law, and not of new law, as the Criminal law of defamation, which was enacted for the first time by the Penal Code. The principle of absolute privilege was recognized by the Privy Council in *Baboo Gummesh Dutt Singh v. Mugneeram Chowdhry* (2), and is based on considerations of public policy.

The Advocate General (Mr. G. H. B. Kenrick, K.C.), for the Crown. The accused can only claim the benefit of Excep. (9) to s. 499 of the Penal Code, which does not import any such absolute immunity as is recognized by English law: see Mayne's Criminal Law of India, pp. 903, 905. In *Queen v. Pursoram Dass* (3), defamatory expressions were held not to be privileged under Excep. (9) unless made in good faith. Allegations in an application for transfer, which were untrue, or made without reasonable grounds, were similarly held to be actionable in a civil suit in *Shibnath Talaputtro v. Sat Cowrie Deb* (4): see also *Chowdhry Goordutt Singh v. Gopal Dass* (5).

The Criminal law of defamation depends on the construction of s. 499, and not the English law, and defamatory statements in a petition presented in a judicial proceeding are not absolutely privileged criminally or civilly: *Greene v. Delanney* (6), *Abdul Hakim v. Tej Chandar Mukarji* (7). In the case of a witness, where a question was put to him, the Bombay High Court held the occasion absolutely privileged: *Nathji Muleshvar v. Lulbhai Ravidat* (8). But the Calcutta High Court dissented from this view in *Augada Ram Shaha v. Nema Chand Shaha* (9) (as

(1) [1891] A. C. 107.

(2) (1872) 11 B. L. R. 321, 328.

(3) (1865) 3 W. R. Cr. 45.

(4) (1865) 3 W. R. 198.

(5) (1866) 1 Agra H. C. R. 33.

(6) (1870) 14 W. R. Cr. 27.

(7) (1881) I. L. R. 3 All. 815.

(8) (1889) I. L. R. 14 Bom. 97.

(9) (1896) I. L. R. 23 Calc. 867.

to defamatory statements in pleadings), which was followed in a criminal case: *Kali Nath Gupta v. Gobinda Chandra Basu* (1). A witness actuated by malice and making a voluntary and irrelevant statement, not elicited by any question put to him, is not privileged: *Haidar Ali v. Abri Mia* (2). The remarks of the learned Chief Justice in *Golap Jan v. Bholanath Khettry* (3) are *obiter*.

1912
KARI SINGH
v.
EMPEROR.

Babu Anulya Charan Chatterjee, in reply.

SHARFUDDIN AND COXE JJ. The accused in this case has been convicted of defaming one, Mr. Macpherson. It appears that in a former case he applied to the District Magistrate for a transfer, and in that application he stated that Mr. Macpherson had brought to Court the manager of the Majhoul Factory, who was the trying Magistrate's tenant, and had had a private talk with the trying Magistrate. He inferred that this was done to put pressure on the trying Magistrate, and to induce him to convict the petitioner.

It appears that this was all pure invention. The manager of the Majhoul Factory was not brought to Court at all, and Mr. Macpherson had no private talk with the trying Magistrate. The assertion clearly amounted to an accusation against Mr. Macpherson that he had attempted to corrupt justice, and it cannot be gainsaid that it was defamatory, and made in bad faith.

The petitioner has obtained a rule on the Magistrate to show cause why the conviction should not be set aside, on the ground that the statement in the application for transfer was absolutely privileged.

(1) (1900) 5 C. W. N. 293.

(2) (1905) I. L. R. 32 Calc. 756.

(3) (1911) I. L. R. 39 Calc. 880.

1912
 KARI SINGH
 v.
 EMPEROR.

It is evident on reference to the terms of the section itself that statements made in bad faith are not protected. But it is argued by the learned pleader who appears in support of this rule, following the decision in *Potaraju Venkata Reddy v. Emperor* (1), that the English common law doctrine of absolute privilege is also law in this country. Speaking with the utmost respect for that decision, we are unable ourselves to take this view. The learned pleader has not shown us any authority, historical or otherwise, for holding that the English common law ever had any application to the Indian mofussil, and despite some casual expressions, in certain decisions, we are unable to understand how it could ever have had any application. It is argued, however, that as the Exceptions in section 499 of the Penal Code correspond only to the classes of qualified privilege in English law, and as there is no reference in the Penal Code to the cases of absolute privilege, it must be assumed that the framers of the Code, who were introducing the English law into this country, cannot have intended to exclude that portion of it. The rule laid down in *Bank of England v. Vagliano* (2), quoted in *Norendra Nath Sircar v. Kamalbasini Dasi* (3), was that the proper course to adopt in construing an Act was to ascertain the natural meaning of its language, and not to assume that it was intended to leave the existing law unaltered, except when that intention was stated. This decision is distinguished on the ground that Lord Herschell, in laying down that rule, was dealing with an Act codifying the existing law, and not with an Act introducing new law. It seems to us that the distinction tells rather against the appellant than for him. If it is wrong to assume that in codifying

(1) (1912) 13 Cr. L. J. 275.

(2) [1891] A. C. 107.

(3) (1896) J. L. R. 23 Calc. 563.

existing law the Legislature intended to leave it unaltered, unless that intention is expressly stated, it seems to us that it would be more, and not less, wrong to assume that in introducing a foreign law into a country the Legislature intended to introduce the whole of it, unless the contrary is expressly stated. It was held in *Gokul Mandar v. Pudmanund Singh* (1) that it is "the essence of a Code to be exhaustive on the matters in respect of which it declares the law, and it is not the province of a Judge to disregard or go outside the letter of the enactment, according to its true construction." The Penal Code certainly declares the law in respect of defamation. It contains a definition of defamation, and sets out a number of Exceptions. It appears to us that it must be regarded as exhaustive on the point. Section 2 enacts that every person shall be liable to punishment under this Code, and not otherwise, for their acts. If there are a number of Exceptions to the offence of defamation, other than those contained in section 499, it appears to us that an offender must be liable to punishment for defamation otherwise than under the Code. On principle, therefore, it would seem to us that section 499 is exhaustive, and that if a defamatory statement does not come within the specified Exceptions, it is not privileged.

It appears to us also that in Bengal the matter is concluded by authority. The cases of *Greene v. Delanney* (2), *Augada Ram Shaha v. Nemai Chand Shaha* (3), *Kāli Nath Gupta v. Gobinda Chandra Basu* (4) seem to us clear authority for holding that the question of privilege must be decided by the terms of section 499. The decisions of this Court that have been cited on behalf of the appellant are, in our opinion,

(1) (1902) I. L. R. 29 Calc. 707.

(3) (1896) I. L. R. 23 Calc. 867.

(2) (1870) 14 W. R. Cr. 27.

(4) (1900) 5 C. W. N. 293.

1912

KARI SINGH
v.
EMPEROR.

1912
 KARI SINGH
 v.
 EMPEROR.

distinguishable. The first case relied on is that of *Baboo Gunnesh Dutt Singh v. Mugneeram Chowdhry* (1). There it was held that, on principles of public policy, a witness cannot be sued for damages in respect of defamatory evidence given by him in a judicial proceeding. But there their Lordships were dealing with a civil suit, and not with a criminal prosecution; and were not considering the effect of section 499 of the Penal Code. This is a real distinction, because, while the law of crimes has been codified and offences have been defined by Statute, the codification of the Law of Torts was abandoned, and actionable wrongs are not defined by Statute. It is likely enough that, if the Law of Torts had been codified, some provisions would have been introduced, such as exists in the Contract Act, by which suits opposed to public policy would have been barred. But this has not been done, and the question, what is or is not an actionable wrong, has to be gathered from case law, and considerations of justice, equity and good conscience, and not from a statutory definition. It is, therefore, possible in such cases to apply principles of the English law which are consonant with justice, equity and good conscience, which would have no application if actionable wrongs had been defined by Statute. Secondly, it is clear that a voluntary statement by an accused is different from a statement made by a witness who is compelled to answer the questions put to him. The distinction may be fine, but it has been recognised and acted upon by this Court. We may refer again to the case of *Kali Nath Gupta v. Gobinda Chandra Basu* (2) quoted above. And in *Haidar Ali v. Abru Mia* (3) the learned Judges refused to extend the privilege even to a witness

(1) (1872) 11 B. L. R. 321.

(2) (1900) 5 C. W. N. 293.

(3) (1905) I. L. R. 32 Calc. 756.

when the statement was not made in answer to a question that the witness was bound to answer, but was volunteered.

In *Bhikumber Singh v. Becharam Sircar* (1), it was held that a statement made by a witness was absolutely privileged. That was a suit for damages; and the case goes no further than *Baboo Gunnessh Dutt Singh v. Mugneeram Chowdhry* (2) already discussed. The same may be said of *Woolfun Bibi v. Jesarat Sheikh* (3). In *Golap Jan v. Bholanath Khettry* (4), the statement was made by a complainant and not by a witness, but the privilege was claimed not in a criminal prosecution but in a suit for damages. That also was a case within the original jurisdiction of this Court, where the application of English law might be supported by arguments that would be inapplicable to a case in the mofussil.

It seems to us, therefore, clear, both on principle and authority, that in Bengal there is no absolute privilege for a statement like that now under consideration, when made in bad faith. It has been pressed upon us that, in the analogous case* brought

(1) (1888) I. L. R. 15 Calc. 264.

(3) (1899) I. L. R. 27 Calc. 262.

(2) (1872) 11 B. L. R. 321.

(4) (1911) I. L. R. 38 Calc. 880.

* KARI SINGH v. EMPEROR. §

1912

CHITTY AND RICHARDSON JJ. In this case the accused, Kari Singh, who is the petitioner before us, was put on his trial before Maulvi Najimuddin, an Honorary Magistrate, on a charge under section 147 of the Indian Penal Code. In the course of that trial he presented a petition to the District Magistrate of Monghyr for a transfer of the case to another Court, on the ground that he would not get a fair and impartial trial before the Honorary Magistrate. Paragraph (5) of that petition was as follows:—

“That on the 17th June last, on the date fixed for hearing of this case, Mr. Macpherson and the manager of Majhoul Kothi, where some properties of the trying Honorary Magistrate have been leased out, came to the Court.

Oct. 11

1912
 KARI SINGH
 v.
 EMPEROR.

by the manager of the Majhoul Factory, a Bench of this Court set aside the conviction, and it has been suggested that we should refer the matter to a Full Bench. But we can only refer to a Full Bench a decision from which we dissent on a point of law, and we do not so dissent from any decision that has been laid before us. In the analogous case the learned Judges expressly declined to lay down any principle of law, and set aside the conviction, because, in view of the two cases cited by them *Potaraju Venkata Reddy v. Emperor* (1) and *Golap Jan v. Bholanath Khettry* (2), the propriety of the conviction was open to serious doubt. But speaking with all respect we are unable to share the doubts of the learned Judges as to what is at present the law on this point in this province.

The Rule is discharged.

Rule discharged.

(1) (1912) 13 Cr. L. J. 275.

(2) (1911) I. L. R. 38 Calc. 880.

of the trying Magistrate and had some private talk with the Honorary Magistrate, and the petitioner apprehends that the manager of the Maghoul Kothi was brought to put additional pressure on the trying Magistrate to induce him to convict the petitioner, and that he cannot get a fair and impartial trial in that Court, or in any other Court in Bengal."

The accused was charged under section 499 of the Indian Penal Code with defaming Mr. Macpherson and also the manager of Majhoul Kothi (Mr. Finch), and has been in each case convicted and sentenced to pay a fine of Rs. 100, or in default to undergo 3 months' simple imprisonment. The accused made two applications to this Court in revision, one in each case. For some reason a Rule was issued only in Mr. Finch's case, the question in Mr. Macpherson's case being left over for further consideration until after the disposal of the Rule so issued.

It has been found as a fact that the allegation above set out was untrue to the knowledge of the accused, inasmuch as neither of the gentlemen in fact came to Begusarai on the day alleged, or had any conversation with the trying Magistrate.

The only question before us is whether the statement of the petitioner must be judged only by the provisions of section 499 of the Indian Penal Code, or whether it was absolutely privileged.

The question in its broadest aspect has been the subject of a large number of judicial decisions in the High Courts of India, and in no one of the Courts have such decisions been entirely uniform.

The statement here is not the statement of a person who is a mere witness, or who is a party to a civil suit. It is the statement made by an accused person in the course of his trial upon a criminal charge. In view of the decisions to which we have been referred, that fact may not be without its importance. It certainly makes it pertinent to observe that in the very recent case of *Potaraju Venkata Reddy v. Emperor* (1), not yet reported in the Indian Law Reports, a Full Bench of the Madras High Court, after a careful examination of the authorities, has held that the statement of an accused person in answer to a question by the trying Court is absolutely privileged. In another recent case in this Court, *Golap Jan v. Bholanath Khettry* (2), where the defamatory statement was made in a complaint preferred under the Criminal Procedure Code, the Chief Justice remarked (p. 888), "but even if the complaint to the Magistrate was defamatory, still the complainant was entitled to protection from suit, and this protection is the absolute privilege accorded in the public interest to those who make statements to the Courts in the course of, and in relation to, judicial proceedings." The remark would apply with as great, or even greater, force to a statement made by an accused person.

We have said that the statement here was made in the course of criminal proceedings, but it was not made in the Court of the trying Magistrate by way of answer to the charge. It was made in the Court of the District Magistrate to support an application for transfer. The order we are about to make must not be understood as in any degree implying that we desire to weaken the sense of responsibility which such applications entail. Sometimes they may be justified. Sometimes they may be mere devices for delaying justice. Or again, they may be resorted to because it is thought that the trial Judge or Magistrate has, not improperly, from personal bias or from extraneous information, but on the bench and judicially, as the case proceeded before him, formed, or provisionally formed, an opinion on the merits, favourable or unfavourable, to one side or the other.

The authorities have been examined so often, and with such differing results, that we do not think that it would serve any useful purpose to traverse the same ground again upon this Rule. The controversy is of a character which can only be finally settled by an authoritative ruling of the Privy Council or by the Legislature. We refrain, therefore, from expressing unqualified opinion upon the question of principle involved, and we content ourselves with saying that, in view of the two cases which we have

(1) (1912) 13 Cr. L. J. 275.

(2) (1911) I. L. R. 38 Calo 880.

1912

KARI SINGH
v.
EMPEROR.

1912
 KARI SINGH
 v.
 EMPEROR

specifically cited, the propriety of the conviction is at least open to serious doubt. In that view of the matter, we make the Rule absolute, set aside the conviction and sentence, and direct that the fine, if paid, be refunded.

A Rule in the same terms must be issued in Mr. Macpherson's case.

E. H. M.

Rule absolute.

CRIMINAL REVISION.

Before Sharfuddin and Gore JJ.

1912
 Dec. 12.

BHIM LAL SAH

v.

EMPEROR.*

Complaint, dismissal of—Jurisdiction to direct a prosecution in the absence of any judicial proceeding—Order not made independently, but on the suggestion of the District Magistrate—Complaint—Preliminary inquiry without the existence of reasons for doubting its truth—Omission to record reasons—Permission given to accused to cross-examine and adduce defence evidence—Penal Code (Act XLV of 1860), s. 211—Criminal Procedure Code (Act V of 1898), ss. 202 and 476—Practice.

Where the petitioner's case was disposed of by the acquittal of the accused, on the 1st August, by a Magistrate who did not then take action under s. 476 of the Criminal Procedure Code, but proceedings thereunder were taken, on the 9th August, and an order made, on the 23rd, by another Magistrate, who had then no seisin of the case, and the District Magistrate having expressed a doubt as to the jurisdiction of the latter, and having considered that such order should be passed by the Magistrate who tried the original case, such Magistrate thereupon, purporting to act under s. 476, directed the prosecution of the petitioner, under s. 211 of the Penal Code, on the 16th September :

Held, (i) that the order of the 23rd August was without jurisdiction, as there was no judicial proceeding of any kind before the Magistrate who passed it ;

(ii) That the order of the 16th September was bad in law, as the trying Magistrate had not considered it necessary to take action under s. 476,

* Criminal Revision, No. 1415 of 1912, against the order of A. McGavin, Deputy Magistrate of Purnea, dated Sept. 16, 1912.