

REGISTERED
SPEED POST



GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF FINANCE
(DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE)

8th Floor, World Trade Centre, Centre - I, Cuffe Parade,
Mumbai-400 005

F.No. 371/287/B/2020-RA/4042 :

Date of Issue: ~~05.2023~~
07.06.2023

ORDER NO. 267/2023-CUS (WZ)/ASRA/MUMBAI DATED 31.05.2023
OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA PASSED BY SHRI SHRAWAN KUMAR,
PRINCIPAL COMMISSIONER & EX-OFFICIO ADDITIONAL SECRETARY TO
THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, UNDER SECTION 129DD OF THE CUSTOMS
ACT, 1962.

Applicants : Shri Ankushkumar Arunkumar Tholiya

Respondent : Commissioner of Customs (Appeals), Mumbai Zone-III.

Subject : Revision Application filed, under Section 129DD of the
Customs Act, 1962 against the Order-in-Appeal No. MUM-
CUSTM-PAX-APP-270/2020-21 dated 24.08.2020 [S/49-
352/2020] [DOI: 25.08.2020] passed by the Commissioner
of Customs (Appeals), Mumbai Zone-III.

ORDER

The Revision Application has been filed by Shri Ankushkumar Arunkumar Tholiya (herein referred to as the "Applicant") against the Order-in-Appeal No. MUM-CUSTOM-PAX-APP-270/2020-21 dated 24.08.2020 [S/49-352/2020] [DOI: 25.08.2020] passed by the Commissioner of Customs (Appeals), Mumbai Zone-III.

2. Brief facts of the case are that on 03.02.2020, the applicant viz Shri Ankushkumar Arunkumar Tholiya holding Indian Passport No. P6264645 arrived at CSI Airport, Mumbai from Dubai by Flight No. IX 248. The Applicant was intercepted by the Officers of Customs, CSI Airport, Mumbai after he had opted for green channel of Customs. The personal search of the Applicant resulted into the recovery of 2 Crude Gold Kadas of 24KT weighing 233 grams valued at Rs. 8,53,996/- which he failed to declare. The same were seized by the officers in the reasonable belief that the same was smuggled into India in a clandestine manner in contravention of the provisions of the Customs Act, 1962.

3. The Original Adjudicating Authority (OAA) viz the Deputy Commissioner of Customs, CSI Airport, Mumbai, vide his OIO no. AirCus/49/1574/2020 'D' dated 03.02.2020 ordered absolute confiscation of the impugned 2 Crude Gold Kadas of 24 KT weighing 233 grams valued at Rs. 8,53,996/- under Section 111 (d), (l) and (m) of Customs Act, 1962 and a penalty of Rs 85,000/- under section 112(a) & (b) of the Customs Act, 1962 was also imposed on the applicant.

4. Aggrieved, with this Order, the Applicant filed an appeal before the Appellate Authority (AA) viz, Commissioner of Customs (Appeals), Mumbai-III,

who vide Order-in-Appeal No. MUM-CUSTOM-PAX-APP-270/2020-21 dated 24.08.2020 [S/49-352/2020] [DOI: 25.08.2020] upheld the order passed by the OAA.

5. Aggrieved by this Order, the applicant has filed this revision application on the grounds as under:

5.1. That the Gold kada was bought for the marriage of his cousin brother and that the applicant had the purchase bill for the same; that he had inadvertently entered the green channel and that he had no intention to evade the duty payment

5.2. The applicant submitted that 24 Kt gold is neither smuggled nor prohibited goods and hence absolute confiscation is not warranted. He relied on the following case laws:

- i) Commissioner of Cus & CE, Nagpur-I Vs Mohd Ashraf Armar [2019(369)ELT 1654 (Tri-Mum)];
- ii) GOI Order in respect of Jatinder Singh [2018(361)ELT 958 (GOI)];

5.3. The Applicant submitted that he is not a habitual offender, the whole incidence was occurred due to his ignorance and that he had no malafide intention to evade duty.

5.4. That the order for absolute confiscation is not legal as 233 grams of Gold Bangle/kada is not a commercial quantity and hence requested to release the gold on payment of duty. He relied on the following case law:

- i) Roshni Mathurdas Kothadia Vs Commissioner of Custom, Hyderabad [2019(369)ELT 1784 (Tri-Hyd)];

5.5. The Applicant submitted that no penalty was warranted as he had no malafide intention to evade any Government duty and relied on the following case law:

- i) Rubeena Khalid Vs Commissioner of CE & Custom, Cochin [2001(137)ELT 446 (Tri-Chennai)];

5.6. In view of the above the applicant requested to set aside the Order in Appeal with consequential relief and the impugned gold may be released on payment of duty.

6. The Respondent-department in reference to the notice issued under Section 129DD of the Customs Act, 1962, furnished submissions vide their letter dated 28-04-2020.

7. Personal hearing in the matter was scheduled for 04.05.2023. Dr. Sanjay Kalra, Advocate appeared for the hearing and reiterated the earlier submissions. He submitted that the applicant has brought small quantity of gold jewellery for personal use in marriage, applicant is not a habitual offender, and applicant produced purchase invoice at the material time. He requested to allow the application on nominal fine and without penalty.

The Applicant vide letter dated 24th May, 2023, further submitted that the he is a NRI staying in UAE and requested to allow re-export of subject goods by the applicant.

8. The Government has gone through the facts of the case, and observes that the applicant has filed this Revision Application on the grounds the OIA upholding the OIO may be set aside on the grounds that the applicant had inadvertently crossed the green channel and had no intention to evade Customs duty on the impugned gold.

9. Government observes that the applicant had failed to declare the impugned gold i.e two crude gold kadas carried by him, to the Customs at the first instance as required under Section 77 of the Customs Act, 1962. The applicant had not disclosed that he was carrying the dutiable goods. By not declaring the gold carried by him, the applicant clearly revealed his intention not to declare the goods and pay Customs duty on it. The grounds of inadvertence is an afterthought and hence the Government finds that the confiscation of the impugned goods was therefore justified.

10.1 The relevant sections of the Customs Act are reproduced below:

Section 2(33)

“prohibited goods” means any goods the import or export of which is subject to any prohibition under this Act or any other law for the time being in force but does not include any such goods in respect of which the conditions subject to which the goods are permitted to be imported or exported have been complied with”

Section 125

“Option to pay fine in lieu of confiscation. - (1) Whenever confiscation of any goods is authorised by this Act, the officer adjudging it may, in the case of any goods, the importation or exportation whereof is prohibited under this Act or under any other law for the time being in force, and shall, in the case of any other goods, give to the owner of the goods or, where such owner is not known, the person from whose possession or custody such goods have been seized, an option to pay in lieu of confiscation such fine as the said officer thinks fit :

Provided that where the proceedings are deemed to be concluded under the proviso to sub-section (2) of section 28 or under clause (i) of sub-section (6) of that section in respect of the goods which are not prohibited or restricted, the provisions of this section shall not apply :

Provided further that, without prejudice to the provisions of the proviso to sub-section (2) of section 115, such fine shall not exceed the market price

of the goods confiscated, less in the case of imported goods the duty chargeable thereon.

(2) Where any fine in lieu of confiscation of goods is imposed under sub-section (1), the owner of such goods or the person referred to in sub-section (1), shall, in addition, be liable to any duty and charges payable in respect of such goods.

(3) Where the fine imposed under sub-section (1) is not paid within a period of one hundred and twenty days from the date of option given thereunder, such option shall become void, unless an appeal against such order is pending.”

10.2. It is undisputed that as per the Foreign Trade Policy applicable during the period, gold was not freely importable and it could be imported only by the banks authorized by the RBI or by others authorized by DGFT and to some extent by passengers. Therefore, gold which is a restricted item for import but which was imported without fulfilling the conditions for import becomes a prohibited goods in terms of Section 2(33) and hence it liable for confiscation under Section 111(d) of the Customs Act.

11.1 The Hon'ble High Court Of Madras, in the case of Commissioner Of Customs (Air), Chennai-I V/s P. Sinnasamy reported in 2016 (344) E.L.T. 1154 (Mad.), relying on the judgment of the Apex Court in the case of Om Prakash Bhatia v. Commissioner of Customs, Delhi reported in 2003 (155) E.L.T. 423 (S.C.), has held that “ *if there is any prohibition of import or export of goods under the Act or any other law for the time being in force, it would be considered to be prohibited goods; and (b) this would not include any such goods in respect of which the conditions, subject to which the goods are imported or exported, have been complied with. This would mean that if the conditions prescribed for import or export of goods are not complied with, it would be considered to be prohibited goods. Hence, prohibition of importation or exportation could be subject to certain prescribed conditions to be fulfilled before or after*

clearance of goods. If conditions are not fulfilled, it may amount to prohibited goods.” It is thus clear that gold, may not be one of the enumerated goods, as prohibited goods, still, if the conditions for such import are not complied with, then import of gold, would squarely fall under the definition, “prohibited goods” in terms of Section 2(33) and hence it is liable for confiscation under Section 111(d) of the Customs Act, 1962.

11.2 Further, in para 47 of the said case the Hon’ble High Court has observed *“Smuggling in relation to any goods is forbidden and totally prohibited. Failure to check the goods on the arrival at the customs station and payment of duty at the rate prescribed, would fall under the second limb of section 112(a) of the Act, which states omission to do any act, which act or omission, would render such goods liable for confiscation.....”*. Thus, failure to declare the goods and failure to comply with the prescribed conditions has made the impugned gold “prohibited” and therefore liable for confiscation and the ‘Applicant’ thus, liable for penalty.

11.3 Once goods are held to be prohibited, Section 125 still provides discretion to consider release of goods on redemption fine. Hon’ble Supreme Court in case of M/s. Raj Grow Impex [CIVIL APPEAL NO(s). 2217-2218 of 2021 Arising out of SLP(C) Nos. 14633-14634 of 2020 – Order dated 17.06.2021] has laid down the conditions and circumstances under which such discretion can be used. The same are reproduced below.

“71. Thus, when it comes to discretion, the exercise thereof has to be guided by law; has to be according to the rules of reason and justice; and has to be based on the relevant considerations. The exercise of discretion is essentially the discernment of what is right and proper; and such discernment is the critical and cautious judgment of what is correct and proper by differentiating between shadow and substance as also between equity and pretence. A holder of public office, when exercising discretion conferred by the statute, has to ensure that such

exercise is in furtherance of accomplishment of the purpose underlying conferment of such power. The requirements of reasonableness, rationality, impartiality, fairness and equity are inherent in any exercise of discretion; such an exercise can never be according to the private opinion.

71.1. It is hardly of any debate that discretion has to be exercised judiciously and, for that matter, all the facts and all the relevant surrounding factors as also the implication of exercise of discretion either way have to be properly weighed and a balanced decision is required to be taken.

12. A plain reading of the section 125 shows that the Adjudicating Authority is bound to give an option of redemption when goods are not subjected to any prohibition. In case of prohibited goods, such as, the gold, the Adjudicating Authority may allow redemption. There is no bar on the Adjudicating Authority allowing redemption of prohibited goods. This exercise of discretion will depend on the nature of the goods and the nature of the prohibition. For instance, spurious drugs, arms, ammunition, hazardous goods, contaminated flora or fauna, food which does not meet the food safety standards, etc. are harmful to the society if allowed to find their way into the domestic market. On the other hand, release of certain goods on redemption fine, even though the same becomes prohibited as conditions of import have not been satisfied, may not be harmful to the society at large. Thus, Adjudicating authority can allow redemption under Section 125 of any goods which are prohibited either under the Customs Act or any other law on payment of fine.

12.1 Government further observes that there are a catena of judgements, over a period of time, of the Hon'ble Courts and other forums which have been categorical in the view that grant of the option of redemption under Section 125

of the Customs Act, 1962 can be exercised in the interest of justice. Government places reliance on some of the judgements as under:

- a) In the case of Commissioner of Customs, Aliganj, Lucknow vs. Rajesh Jhamatmal Bhat, [2022(382) E.L.T. 345 (All)], the Lucknow Bench of the Hon'ble High Court of Allahabad, has held at Para 22 that "Customs Excise & Service Tax Appellate Tribunal Allahabad has not committed any error in upholding the order dated 27.08.2018 passed by the Commissioner (Appeals) holding that Gold is not a prohibited item and, therefore, it should be offered for redemption in terms of Section 125 of the Act."
- b) The Hon'ble High Court of Judicature at Madras, in the judgment in the case of Shik Mastani Bi vs. Principal Commissioner of Customs, Chennai-I [2017(345) E.L.T. 201 (Mad)] upheld the order of the Appellate Authority allowing re-export of gold on payment of redemption fine.
- c) The Hon'ble High Court of Kerala at Ernakulam in the case of R. Mohandas vs. Commissioner of Cochin [2016(336) E.L.T, 399 (Ker.)] has, observed at Para 8 that "The intention of Section 125 is that, after adjudication, the Customs Authority is bound to release the goods to any such person from whom such custody has been seized..."
- d) Also, in the case of Union of India vs Dhanak M Ramji [2010(252) E.L.T. A102(S.C)], the Hon'ble Apex Court vide its judgement dated 08.03.2010 upheld the decision of the Hon'ble High Court of Judicature at Bombay [2009(248) E.L.T. 127 (Bom)], and approved redemption of absolutely confiscated goods to the passenger.

12.2 Government, observing the ratios of the above judicial pronouncements, arrives at the conclusion that decision to grant the option of redemption would be appropriate in the facts and circumstances of the instant case.

13. In the instant case, the quantum of gold involved is small (only 233 grams) and is not of commercial quantity. The quantum of the same does not suggest the act to be one of organized smuggling by a syndicate. Government, notes that the impugned gold was in the form of jewellery (Kada), they were not ingeniously concealed. The applicant claimed that the jewellery was for personal use and also produced the copy of the Purchase Bill. Further, there were no allegations that the Applicant is a habitual offender and was involved in similar offences earlier. The facts of the case indicate that it is a case of non-declaration of gold, rather than a case of smuggling for commercial considerations. The absolute confiscation of the gold, is therefore harsh and disproportionate. The applicant vide his later submissions, submitted his desire to take it back. Government observes that this request of re-export was made in their appeal filed with Commissioner Appeal. Considering the quantity of gold, the same not being concealed in an ingenious manner, applicant being a NRI staying in UAE, the absolute confiscation of the same was harsh and not justified.

14.1 In view of the above facts, Government is inclined to modify the absolute confiscation upheld by the AA and allow the impugned 2 Crude Gold Kadas weighing 233 grams valued at Rs. 8,53,996/- to be re-exported on payment of redemption fine.

14.2 The Applicant has also pleaded not to impose any penalty on him. Government observes that if the applicant was not intercepted by the officers he would have not paid the duty on the impugned goods and hence penalty is justified. In this case the confiscated goods were 2 Crude Gold Kadas weighing 233 grams valued at Rs. 8,53,996/- which the applicant was wearing, hence the penalty imposed Rs.85,000/- under Section 112(a) & (b) of the Customs

Act, 1962 which is harsh and requires to be revised which should be commensurate to the omissions and commissions of the Applicant.

15.1 In view of the above, the Government sets aside the impugned order of the Appellate authority and allows the applicant to redeem the 2 Crude Gold Kadas weighing weighing 233 grams valued at Rs. 8,53,996/- for re-export on payment of redemption fine of Rs.1,50,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Fifty Thousand Only).

15.2 The penalty of Rs. 85,000/- imposed under Section 112(a) and (b) of the Customs Act, 1962 is reduced to Rs. 50,000/- as the same would be appropriate and commensurate with the omissions and commissions of the Applicant.

16. The Revision Application is disposed of on the above terms.


(SHRAWAN KUMAR)

Principal Commissioner & ex-officio
Additional Secretary to Government of India

ORDER NO. A67/2023-CUS (WZ)/ASRA/MUMBAI DATED 31.05.2023

To,

1. Shri Ankushkumar Arunkumar Tholiya, Bajar Peth, Kannad, Aurangabad, Maharashtra-431103.
2. The Pr. Commissioner of Customs, CSI Airport, Sahar, Andheri East, Mumbai-400099.

Copy to:

1. The Commissioner of Customs (Appeals), Mumbai-III, Awas Corporate Point (5th Floor), Makwana Lane, Behind S.M.Centre, Andheri-Kurla Road, Marol, Mumaa-400059.
2. Dr.Sanjay Kalra, KPS Legal, D 414, 4th Floor, Brahma Shopping Centre. Plot No. 53, Opposite D Mart, Sector-15, CBD Belpur, Navi Mumbai-400614
3. Sr. P.S. to AS (RA), Mumbai.
4. Notice Board.