

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Gangabai Gopaldas Mohata

Vs.

Fulchand

C.A.No.16885 of 1996

(M.M.Punchhi and K.T.Thomas JJ.)

19.12.1996

JUDGEMENT

THOMAS, J.:-

1. Leave granted.

2. This appeal is by a decree-holder whose efforts to execute the decree have now been stalled at the instance of a third party who claims to be the transferee of the interest of the decree holder in the decree "by operation of law". The application filed by the said third party who is (first respondent herein) purportedly under Order 21, Rule 16 of the Code of Civil Procedure (for short "the Code") though repelled by the execution Court was allowed by the High Court as per the order challenged in this appeal.

3. More facts: Appellant Gangabai leased out a portion of her land (in Nazul plot No. 2, sheet No.

15/B of Murtizapur Municipality) to one Ram Pratap Agrawal (predecessor of respondents Nos. 2 to 5). A civil suit was filed by the appellant in 1970 for recovery of possession of the land from the lessee. That suit was decreed by the trial Court and in appeal filed by respondent Nos. 2 to 5 the suit was compromised pursuant to which a compromise decree was passed. As per the terms of the compromise decree the judgment-debtors (respondents Nos. 2 to 5) were to vacate the premises by 31-12-1990. As they failed to vacate within the said time limit the appellant took out execution proceedings.

4. What happened in the meanwhile is the cause for this appeal. Murtizapur Municipal Council (hereinafter referred to as the 'Municipal Council') attached the right of the appellant in the very same property for arrears of municipal tax claimed from the appellant. The Municipal Council put the property to public auction. Appellant then filed a civil suit for injunction against the Municipal Council from proceeding with the sale on a contention that the tax arrears against the Municipal Council were not really due from her. On an application filed by the appellant in the suit under Order 39 Rule 1 of the Code an order was passed on 24-2-1984 dismissing the application with the following observations :

"I may observe that the sale of the buildings of the plaintiff might be held by the defendant but it should not be confirmed before 16 days after the sale. If before expiry of this period the plaintiff furnishes a security before this Court to the extent of the amount due against her, then the sale be not confirmed for one month more. If within the period of such one month the plaintiff deposits the entire amount in the Court the sale will be cancelled. If the said amount is not deposited, then the sale may be confirmed, with these observations I dismiss the application."

(Emphasis supplied)

5. Municipal Council thereupon conducted the public sale on 27-2-1984 in which the present first respondent - Fulchand was the highest bidder. He deposited 1/4th of the bid amount on the same day. However, appellant deposited an amount of Rs. 50,000/- in Court on 12-3-1984, which is more than the arrears of tax amount claimed by the Municipal Council. Normally, by operation of the order dated 24-2-1984 of the Civil Court the sale should have remained cancelled by the aforesaid deposit. But the scope for dispute arose between the appellant and the first respondent on account of what happened subsequent thereto. Appellant filed an application for cancellation of sale which was dismissed by the Court with the observation that it is open to him to file a fresh suit for that purpose. Though the appellant filed a fresh suit the same was dismissed for default on 7-11-1990.

6. First respondent deposited balance of the bid amount i.e. 3/4th of the bid amount, with the Municipal Council, on 9-11-1990. The Chief Officer of the Municipal Council thereupon issued a Sale Certificate in favour of first respondent. It was on the strength of the said Sale Certificate that first respondent moved the present application under Order 2 1, Rule 16 of the Code.

7. Execution Court took the view that the Sale Certificate issued by the Municipal Council was not in accordance with law and hence first respondent cannot be substituted as transferee of the decree-holder. But a single Judge of the Bombay High Court (Nagpur Bench) took a contrary view that the dispute between first respondent and the decree-holder is not the kind of dispute which execution Court could resolve under Section 47 of the Code. Learned single Judge observed that the Court exercising power under Order 21, Rule 16 of the Code has only a limited jurisdiction as the Court cannot examine the legality of the documents of title. Learned Judge expressed that the execution Court has committed a patent illegality in assuming jurisdiction under Section 47 of the Code and recording the finding that the sale certificate was illegal and the reasoning adopted by the executing Court is totally erroneous.

8. Section 47 of the Code is couched in a very wide language. The very object is to avert another suit concerning the decree under execution. "Sub-section (1) of Section 47 of the Code (provides) that".

"(1) All questions arising between the parties to the suit in which the decree was passed, or their representatives, and relating to the execution, discharge or satisfaction of the decree, shall be determined by the Court executing the decree and not by a separate suit."

Perhaps sub-section (1) would not have made it clear that dispute between a party to the suit and another claiming to be his representative could have been resolved in execution proceedings. But that doubt no longer subsists in view of sub-section (3) which reads:

"(3) Where a question arises as to whether any person is or is not the representative of a party, such question shall, for the purposes of this section, be determined by the Court."

Even a transferee pendente lite is representative of his transferor within the meaning of sub-section (3) of Section 47. One who claims to be transferee by operation of law would as well be a representative and if his claim to be a representative is disputed either by the opposite party or by the party under whom he claims, such dispute must also be resolved by the executing Court itself. The word "representative" used in Section 47 is obviously much wider than the words "legal representative" as used in Section 50 of the Code.

9. If a person approaches the execution Court claiming that he is the representative of decree holder's interest in the decree and the decree-holder disputes it, the execution Court has to resolve the dispute for proceeding with the execution of the decree. The view of the learned single Judge of

the High Court of Bombay that the Court has only a limited jurisdiction is, therefore, not in consonance with the wide language employed in Section 47 of the Code.

10. Order 21, Rule 16 encompasses two types of transferee - one, a transferee by virtue of an instrument of assignment and the other a transferee "by operation of law". In this case, first respondent claims to be transferee of the decree holder's interest by virtue of the sale conducted by the Municipal Council. But the legal consequence of the order of the Civil Court dated 24-2-1984 was that, on depositing the tax arrears within the time stipulated in the order, the sale would go off. Merely because the suit was subsequently dismissed the legal effect of the Court's direction contained in the interlocutory order dated 24-2-1984 would not become a nullity. Whatever happened during the pendency of the suit, and what all actions taken pursuant to any orders passed by the Court during the interregnum would remain a reality unless the Court itself had disturbed or modified them.

11. Would first respondent have got the rights of the appellant by bidding in a sale which was conditioned by the Court through the order dated 24-2-1984. The sale should have gone off the very day the plaintiff in that suit had deposited the amount as per directions of the Court. Neither the Chief Officer nor even the Municipal Council had the authority to by-pass the order of the Civil Court by confirming the sale on a later day without even obtaining permission from the Court.

12. That apart, here the sale was conducted by the Municipal Council on 27-2-1984 as per "the Maharashtra Municipalities (Sale of Distraigned or Attached Movable and Immovable Property) Rules, 1967" framed under the Maharashtra Municipalities Act, 1965. Rule 8(2) of the said Rules says that if the sale pertains to immovable property the person who is declared to be the purchaser shall deposit 25 percent. of the sale price, immediately after his bid is accepted, to the officer conducting the sale. Regarding payment of the balance sale amount the Rule stipulates that "the purchaser shall pay the balance, within 15 days from the date of sale of the property, to the office of the Council. If the last day be a Sunday or a public holiday, then payment shall be made on the first working day immediately after such day."

13. Sub-rule (3) provides the consequence of failure to pay the balance amount within the aforesaid period of 15 days. His deposit shall be forfeited to the Council and the property shall be re-sold at his risk. The purchaser shall forfeit all claims to the sale price realised on resale and if such results in any loss to the Council, he shall be liable for such loss. "The only power which the statute has conferred on the Chief Officer regarding confirmation of the sale has been stated in Rule 13(1) quoted below

" 13. The Chief Officer to confirm the sale:- (1) If no objection, is raised within twenty-one days from the date on which the sale of immovable property is held, or even when any objections are so raised and the Chief Officer is satisfied that there is no valid reason to set aside the sale and if full

payment is made as required by these rules, the Chief Officer shall confirm the sale by granting a certificate as required by sub-section (2) of Section 156 in Form "C".

(Emphasis supplied)

14. A reading of Rule 8(2) in association with sub-rule (3) and Rule 13 would unmistakably show that the requirement to pay the balance -75 percent within 15 days is mandatory. The consequence of non-payment of the balance amount within the fixed period must peremptorily visit the purchaser. Neither the Chief Officer nor even the Municipal Council has power to relax or even condone the delay and accept delayed payment. If any officer accepted the money after the period fixed under sub-rule (2) the action of the officer has no support of law and no legal effect would flow therefrom. The sale consequently becomes void.

15. Rules relating to Court sale provided in Order 21, Rules 84 and 85 are analogous. They require the purchaser to make deposit of 1/4th of the purchase money immediately after sale and the balance shall be deposited within 15 days. This Court held in Manilal Mohanlal Shah v. Sardar Sayed Ahmed Sayed Mahamad. 1966 (1) SCR 108: (AIR 1954 SC 349), that non-compliance with Rules 84 and 85 of Order 21 would render the sale void in the eye of law. The contention in the said case, that non-compliance with the aforesaid rule only renders the sale irregular, was repelled by this Court. The same principle would apply to the sale regulations contained in the above quoted Maharashtra Rules.

16. Here the sale was conducted on 27-2-1984. The bidder who made his initial deposit of 25,000/- did not pay the balance within the period of 15 days i.e. 13-3-1984. Instead the payment was made only on 9-1-1990 which was 6 years 8 months and 12 days after the sale. The excuse advanced by the first respondent was that the amount could not be paid on account of pendency of the civil suit filed by the appellant. On the other hand appellant contends that first respondent did not make the payment as he too was pretty sure that the sale of 27-2-1984 stood cancelled by the operation of the conditions imposed by the Court. Whatever be the excuse the fact remains that first respondent did not pay the balance sale amount within 15 days of sale. The sale of 27-2-1984 would, therefore, stand annulled ipso jure without anything more.

17. Learned counsel for the first respondent relied on two decisions of this Court to support his contention that stranger auction-purchaser must be protected against the attempts of judgment debtor or decree-holder to ebb him out even if there were laches on the part of those persons in conducting the sale [Janak Raj v. Gurdial Singh, 1967 (2) SCR 77: (AIR 1967 SC 608), and Sardar Govindrao Mahadid v. Devi Sahai, 1982 (2) SCR 186: (AIR 1982 SC 989)]. Neither of these two decisions has any usefulness in this case. It has been observed in Janak Raj's case (supra) that if the sale had been validly held and if no application to set aside the sale was made or if the application was made and the same was dismissed, the Court has no choice but to confirm the sale. The

difference here is that the sale was not validly made at all as the failure on the part of the purchaser in depositing the balance sale price within the time limits has rendered the sale a non est.

18. The conclusion is that first respondent did not legally acquire the interest of the decree holder in the property. He is, therefore, not a transferee by "operation of law" as envisaged under Order 21, Rule 16 of the Code. His application for substitution is hence liable to be dismissed.

19. In the result, we allow this appeal and set aside the impugned order of the learned single Judge of the High Court of Bombay (Nagpur Bench) and also dismiss the application filed by the first respondent for substitution under Order 21, Rule 16 of the Code.

Appeal allowed.