

(1970) 10 RAJ CK 0014
In the Rajasthan High Court
Case No : Company Petition No. 11 of 1967

Kota Straw Boards (P) Ltd. and Others	APPELLANT
Vs	
B. Gopaldas and Others	RESPONDENT

Date of Decision : 21-10-1970

Acts Referred:

Arbitration Act, 1940 — Section 2, 34
COMPANIES ACT, 1956 — Section 339, 389, 433, 434

Citation : (1970) WLN 572

Hon'ble Judges : P.N. Shinghal, J

Bench : Single Bench

Judgement

P.N. Shinghal, J.—In connection with the petition which has been filed by the three potitioners for the winding up of the Kota Straw Board (Private) Limited, Kota, hereinafter called "the respondent Company", an application has been made by the respondent Company u/s 34 of the Arbitration Act for stay of the proceedings. The question for decision therefore is whether that application should be allowed?

2. It will be sufficient to state, for purposes of the present controversy, that the petition for winding up has been made with the allegation that the respondent Company is unable to pay its debts within the meaning of clause (e) of Section 433 of the Companies Act and that it is just and equitable that it should be wound up under clause (f) of that section. In substance, the petitioners have alleged that the Comapny should be deemed to be unable to pay its debts within the meaning of Section 434(1)(a) of the Companies Act. The respondent Company has, in its turn, made the aforesaid application u/s 34 of the Arbitration Act on March 25, 1968 and the question whether it should be allowed has arisen in these circumstances.

3. It has been argued by Mr. Lodha, learned Counsel for the petitioner that Section 339 of the Companies Act, 1956, which gave the right to a Company to refer its differences to arbitration, has been deleted by the Companies

(Amendment) Act, 1960, and that any plea that there was an arbitration agreement between the respondent Company is no longer permissible and should be rejected. I am not persuaded, however, that this argument is correct. An arbitration agreement is a contract to submit the differences between the parties to a tribunal of their choice, and as a Company has a legal personality of its own, and has the power to enter into a contract, there is no reason why it should not be able to enter into an agreement to submit its differences with the other party, to arbitration out of court. In this view of the matter, Section 389, as it stood before its deletion by the Companies (Amendment) Act, 1960, did not confer any additional right on a Company apart from its ordinary contractual right, and its deletion in 1960 cannot be a matter of any consequence so far as the authority to enter into an arbitration agreement is concerned and does not, at any rate, justify the argument that a company is precluded from making an arbitration agreement because its deletion. This view finds support from the observations made by their Lordships of the Supreme Court in *Society Do Traction Et D' Electricits Societe Anonyme v. Kamani Engineering Company Ltd.* (1).

4. Having put aside argument of Mr. Lodha, I shall proceed to examine whether there was an arbitration agreement in the present case. Mr. Garg, learned Counsel for the respondent Company, has, in this connection, relied on paragraph 10 of the respondent Company's letter Ex. 2 dated Jan. 16, 1964. That paragraph, it is admitted, is similar in the case of all the petitioners, and reads as follows--

(10) That in case of any dispute arising between us, the matter may be referred to arbitration mutually agreed upon and acceptable by you and us.

5. The question is whether this paragraph is an "arbitration agreement" within the meaning of clause (a) of Section 2 of the Arbitration Act 7 That clause defines "arbitration agreement" as follows,--

(a) ?arbitration agreement? means a written agreement to submit present or future differences to arbitration, whether arbitrator is named therein or not

It is by now well settled that the question whether a particular agreement amounts to an arbitration agreement or not depends on the intention of the parties to make a submission to arbitration. The law in this respect has been stated as follows in Russell On the Law of Arbitration, 17th edition, at page number 23,--

The essential requirement is that the parties should intend to make a submission to arbitration.

Dealing with the matter further, it has been observed at page 25 (supra) that "the parties must be ad idem". The present controversy has therefore to be resolved by an answer to the question whether the parties were ad idem on the submission of their differences to arbitration.

6. It will appear from the wordings of paragraph (10) of the respondent Company's own letter Ex 2 (supra) to the petitioners, on which considerable reliance has been placed by the learned Counsel for the respondent Company, that it has made use of the word "say". And reading of the paragraph shows that it does not make it clear whether the option to refer the difference to arbitration is of the one party, against the other. At any rate, no such words have been used in that paragraph as to show that an option has been given to any one of the parties in that respect. It will therefore appear that if the option is of both the parties, then both of them will have to agree to refer their differences to arbitration in pursuance of another agreement between them, so that the paragraph amounts to no more than, an agreement to enter into an agreement and is quite in effective. It may be mentioned that such a mutuality for a future agreement is reflected in the subsequent portion of paragraph (10) which provides for an agreement between the parties for purposes of arbitration. At any rate it cannot be said that the parties were ad idem on the question of referring their disputes to arbitration within the meaning of clause (a) of Section 2 of the Arbitration Act so that it cannot be said that there is an arbitration agreement between them.

7. I may in this connection make a reference to the decision in *Jyoti Brothers Vs. Shree Durga Mining Co.*, In that case the word "can" was used in the relevant clause, which ran as follows,--

In the event of any dispute arising out of this contract the same can be settled by Arbitration held by a Chamber of Commerce at Madras. Their decision shall be binding to the Buyers and the Sellers.

It was held that the wordings of the clauses did not mean that the dispute shall be settled by arbitration, and that it only meant that, after the dispute had occurred, the parties may go to arbitration as an alternative method of settling the dispute instead of going to the courts. The view I have taken, therefore, finds support from the decision in this case.

8. The learned Counsel for the petitioners has argued that as an arbitration agreement has the effect of ousting the jurisdiction of the Civil Courts, in the normal way, it should be construed strictly. He has placed reliance on *Tarachand v. Parasram and Ors.* AIR 1930 Sin 202, which has been followed in *M. I. Shahdad v. Mohd. Abdullah Mar and Ors.* AIR 1967 J&K 120, and on the decision in *re: Shrikrishna Khanna and brothers* AIR 1967 J&K 120, *Hormusji and Daruwalla v. District Local Board, Karachi* AIR 1931 Sin 200, *Re: Re: Arbn. Seth Kerorimal Adwani Vs. Union of India (UOI)*, and *Re: Arbn. Seth Kerorimal Adwani Vs. Union of India (UOI)*, , in support of his contention. I do not, however, think it necessary to express any opinion on the question whether an arbitration agreement is of such a special nature as to require a stricter construction of its terms than any other contract for, as has been stated, the relevant clause of the agreement relied upon by the respondent Company does not amount to an arbitration agreement on any construction thereof.

9. Mr. Garg has cited Chhabildas Nandlal and Co. Vs. Damodar Khetsey and Co., in which the word "may" has been used in the relevant clause, and has argued that a similar construction should be placed on the aforesaid paragraph (10) of the respondent Company's letter Ex. 2. A reading of the judgment shows that the material portion of the agreement was as follows,--

Any complaint, claim, disputes, doubt or question (not otherwise settled by mutual consent) arising out of this indent, may at the instance of either party thereto be referred to arbitration to two European merchants with power, in the event of disagreement, to an umpire.

It will thus appear the word "may" was followed immediately by the words "at the instance of either party", so that there could be no doubt that the words amounted to an agreement between the parties that if either of them desire that any dispute arising out of the indent should be submitted to arbitration, it will be submitted to arbitration. The agreement therefore fill squarely within the definition of "arbitration agreement" contained in Section 2(a) of the Arbitration Act so that the case is clearly distinguishable.

10. As I have taken the view that there is no arbitration agreement between the parties, the application of the respondent Company u/s 34 of the Arbitration Act is rejected.