

(1990) 02 KL CK 0028
In the High Court Of Kerala
Case No : M.F.A. No. 468 of 1984

N.K.K. Siva Baghyam and Others

APPELLANT

Vs

P.V. Kalliani Amma and Others

RESPONDENT

Date of Decision : 27-02-1990

Acts Referred:

Citation : (1991) 2 ACC 464 : (1991) ACJ 283

Hon'ble Judges : L. Manoharan, J;K.T. Thomas, J

Bench : Division Bench

Advocate : A.K. Srinivasan, for the Appellant; S. Parameswaran, Viswambharan, K.K. Appu, T.A. Ramadasan, V. Divakaran Poti, Siby Mathew and A.A. Mohammed Nazir, for the Respondent

Final Decision : Allowed

Judgement

K.T. Thomas, J.—In an accident which happened on 8th March, 1981, one M.P. Purushothaman sustained injuries and died of those injuries. His widow and children made a claim on the owner, driver and the insurer of bus KLC 5102 for compensation. The Motor Accidents Claims Tribunal assessed a sum of Rs. 75,000/- as the compensation payable to the claimants, but the Claims Tribunal deducted 50 per cent therefrom on the premise that the accident happened on account of the composite negligence perpetrated by the bus driver and the driver of the tempo van (KLN 2667) in which the deceased was then travelling. The claimants, widow and children of the deceased, have filed this appeal dissatisfied with the award.

2. The accident happened in this way: the tempo van was proceeding from south to north along National Highway No. 17. The bus was coming from a bylane which converged into the national highway at the place of occurrence. As the bus entered the national highway, it collided with the tempo van.

3. The deceased was aged around 36 when he died. Claimants gave evidence to show that he was doing wholesale business in eggs. The Claims Tribunal

accepted the said evidence. But the Claims Tribunal found that his yearly income did not exceed Rs. 15,000/-. The Tribunal further found that the accident was the result of negligence on the part of both the drivers, as the driver of the bus got into the national highway unmindful of the vehicles plying there and the driver of the van was found negligent in having kept his wrong side.

4. Learned counsel for the appellants contended that the Claims Tribunal went wrong in finding that the accident was the consequence of negligence on the part of the van driver also. We have examined the relevant evidence on that aspect. We have our own reasons to hold that the Claims Tribunal erred in finding that there was composite negligence of the bus driver and van driver in causing the accident. As the broad case is admitted by both sides that the bus was entering into the national highway from a bylane, the degree of care, diligence and circumspection which the bus driver should have adopted was of a far higher one. He is permitted to take his vehicle into the main road from a bylane only after ensuring that his passage is clear and that there is no risk involved in taking the vehicle into the main road, since the vehicles plying on the main road have the right of passage through the main road. As the accident is a collision between a vehicle which went into the main road from a bylane and another vehicle which was already plying through the main road, the doctrine of *res ipsa loquitur* heavily favours the van driver and raises a presumption that the negligence was on the part of the bus driver. Of course, he is entitled to rebut the presumption. But no counter theory was advanced by the owner and driver of the bus in the joint written statement filed by them, except saying that the van was proceeding through the eastern side of the national highway. RW 1 was the driver of the bus. Though he stuck to his theory that the van kept to the eastern side of the national highway, his further answers have completely shattered the possibility of the van being driven through the wrong side of the road. This is because RW 1 admitted that the spot of the bus where the van hit was the front right side of the bus. If, as a matter of fact, the bus, after entering into the main road, had turned to south and was then hit against by another vehicle which kept the eastern side of the main road, the spot of hit would necessarily have been the front left side of the bus. When RW 1 was confronted with this aspect, he candidly admitted that the spot of hit would not have been on the front right side of the bus, if the bus was driven in the manner suggested by him during examination.

5. Having analysed the evidence in the light of all probabilities and circumstances in this case, we have no manner of doubt in concluding that the accident was entirely due to the negligence on the part of the bus driver. Accordingly we set aside the finding of the Claims Tribunal that the accident was the result of composite negligence of the drivers of both the vehicles. In the light of our finding on this aspect, it is unnecessary to consider whether the Claims Tribunal went wrong in deducting the percentage on the premise of composite negligence of both the drivers.

6. Now we come to the question of quantum of compensation. Claims Tribunal found the annual income of the deceased as Rs. 10,000/-. He deducted 25 per cent from out of the said income as necessary for the personal expenses of the deceased and assessed the loss of income on the assumption that the balance of Rs. 7,500/- would go to the claimants. In fixing the annual income of the deceased, the Claims Tribunal has improperly declined to take into account the individual income assessed by the income tax authorities for the assessment year 1978-79. Exh. A-2 is the assessment order relating to the individual income of the deceased for the assessment year 1978-79. It shows that the deceased had an annual net income of Rs. 10,530/-. Exh. A-3 is the assessment order relating to a firm called M/s. P.C. Traders of which the deceased was partner having 35 per cent share. In Exh. A-3, deceased's share of profit was assessed at Rs. 1,260/- for the assessment year 1980-81. Exh. A-4 is the assessment order relating to another firm called M/s. Purushothaman & Co., in which the deceased had 50 per cent share. Exh. A-4 assessed the profit of the deceased for the assessment year 1980-81 at Rs. 9,739/-. It appears to us that the Claims Tribunal has marginalised the individual income of the deceased. This may be because Exh. A-2 was for the assessment year 1978-79 whereas the accident occurred on 8.3.1981. There is no reason to ignore Exh. A-2 for the purpose of assessing the total income of the deceased. When that also is added to the possible income of the deceased, it is reasonable to assume that the deceased would have had an income of Rs. 20,000/- per annum. As the Claims Tribunal deducted 25 per cent therefrom towards personal expenses of the deceased, there is nothing wrong in making a further deduction of another 25 per cent therefrom which amount may be necessary for augmenting the business further. Even then the share of the claimants from out of the income of the deceased would have been Rs. 10,000/- per annum.

7. The Claims Tribunal fixed the multiplier at ten. According to us, the aforesaid fixation is patently unjust in view of the fact that the deceased died at a relatively young age of 36, hale and hearty, that too while engaged in business dealings. Even after giving a margin for health hazards and other imponderables in life, it is only just and proper to assume that the deceased would have continued to earn at the same level and rate for another 20 years. Therefore, the multiplier in this case should have been fixed as 20. As the claimants have not put forward any other valid counts for assessment of compensation, we are constrained to fix the amount of compensation on the count of loss of income for the family as a consequence of the death of the deceased. On a calculation of the compensation with the data adverted to above, we arrive at a figure of Rs. 2,00,000/-. As the claimants are getting the compensation amount as a lump sum, there is justification in making a further reduction. We hold that, in the circumstances of this case, 15 per cent can be reduced on the said score. The balance comes to Rs. 1,70,000/-. We have no reason to deny the claimants the benefit of the aforesaid assessment.

8. In the result, we allow this appeal and modify the award in the following

terms: claimants are entitled to get a total compensation amount of Rs. 1,70,000/- from respondent Nos. 1 and 3 (owner and driver of bus KIC 5102) with interest at 6 per cent per annum from the date of claim petition. We direct the second respondent, insurance company, to pay the said sum, after deducting the amount, if any, paid already.

9. Appeal is disposed of in the above terms.