

(1931) 11 PRI CK 0002

In the Privy Council

Case No : Privy Council Appeal No. 79 of 1930

Promatha Nath Mittra and others

APPELLANT

Vs

Gostha Behari Sen and others

RESPONDENT

Date of Decision : 24-11-1931

Acts Referred:

Citation : (1932) AIR(PC) 43

Hon'ble Judges : George Lowndes, Andsir, Salvesen, The Lord Chancellor.-, JJ.

Advocate : S. Hyam, B. Dube, A. M. Dunne, for the Appearing Parties.

Judgement

Lord Salvesen

This is an appeal from a judgment and decree dated 16th August 1928 of the High Court of Judicature at Fort William in Bengal, which affirmed a judgment and decree dated 13th February 1926 of the Additional District Judge of Alipore, who had reversed the judgment and decree dated 21st August 1924 of the Subordinate Judge of Alipore.

The facts of the case may be very shortly stated. The suit relates to three plots of land of the total area of 6 bighas, situated not far from Calcutta. The appellants, who are known as the Mittras of Shambazar, and are hereafter referred to as Mittras, have a 12 anna undivided share in these lands. The defendants respondents, hereinafter referred to as Boses own a 4 anna share. The appearing respondent, Gostha Behari Sen (hereinafter called the respondent), was desirous of obtaining a lease of the whole lands, and commenced negotiations for this purpose in the beginning of 1919 by sounding the appellants through their representative as to their willingness to lease their interests in the lands. Nothing came of these primary negotiations, but in January 1920, the appellant again called at the house of the Mittras. According to his own evidence, he was then informed that settlement could only be made with the consent of those who represented the Boses' four anna share. At the same time the Mittras indicated the terms upon which they for their part would be disposed to agree to such a lease. Within eight or ten days after this the

respondent, according to his own evidence, saw the representatives of the Boses, who told him that they had given their consent to the proposed lease and had instructed the manager of the Mittras accordingly. He then called on the Mittras on 13th January, and the result of his interview with them was a document in the following terms:

?A be-meadi (without any fixed period) settlement with Gosto Behari Sen in respect of the jama (tenancy) at Bonehughli formerly held by Jogendra Nath Bagchi and at present in the khas possession of the estate is approved on the following terms: (1) A total sum of Rs. 300 should be paid as Selami (bonus) for this jama; (2) the annual rent is fixed at Rs. 60; (3) the lessee would not be entitled to alienate this jama at any time on any ground whatever; if he does, the jama would become khas; (4) if the land is acquired by Government, the proprietors would get a moiety of the compensation money; (5) the lessee would not be authorized to make a permanent or Kaemi settlement with, or to grant a long lease to, any person. 28th September 1926.

?(Sd.) P. Mitra.

(Sd.) B. B. Mitra.

?13-1-20."

It will be observed that this document was not signed by the respondent and that it deals with the whole lands, of which it was known to the parties at the time that the Mittras only held a 12 annas undivided share. Yet, on the terms of this document alone and without reference to the evidence, which gives no support to his conclusion, the District Judge has held that it was a "final contract" and that the Mittras thereby undertook a binding obligation on behalf of themselves and of the other cosharers that the respondent was to obtain a lease of the whole lands on the terms briefly set forth in the document itself. Their Lordships are clearly of opinion that, looking to the state of mind of both parties at the time, such an obligation cannot be implied. On the one hand, the Mittras had clearly stated from the first that they would only grant a lease to the respondent if the consent of the other cosharers was obtained, and, on the other hand, the respondent was at the time under the belief that he had already secured the assent of those cosharers to the proposed lease. It is incredible under these circumstances that the appellants should either have been asked or agreed to bind themselves to an unconditional contract of lease of lands which in part did not belong to them. On the other hand, the document is entirely consistent with the attitude of the appellants that they were adjusting the terms of the proposed lease on the footing that the other cosharers in the lands had already consented..

or at all events were prepared to consent, to a settlement on similar terms. Moreover, it was throughout admittedly in the contemplation of both parties that a formal kabuliyat would be drawn up as between the respondents and all the cosharers in which the full terms of the proposed lease would be embodied. In fact, an oral agreement to this effect was entered into at the same interview.

Thus it would be more proper to describe the document as heads of a proposed agreement than as a final contract, as it has been interpreted by the District Judge.

Following on the signature of the Mittras to the document in question, the respondent paid Rs. 300, which was to be the selami in respect of the whole lands. This is easily explained on the footing that the respondent believed that he had already obtained the consent of the other owners and that the whole matter of the proposed lease had been substantially arranged with all the parties concerned.

In terms of the arrangement made as above set forth the respondent on 15th January had a draft kabuliyat prepared and sent to the appellants' representatives. This draft was revised by them and was subsequently registered by the respondent. This draft contains numerous additions to the heads of agreement of 13th January, and it is addressed not to the Mittras alone, but to the other co-sharers. So far as the Mittras were concerned, the plain inference from the terms of the kabuliyat is that no lease could be concluded without the signature of the other cosharers, to whom along with them it was addressed. On the other hand, the respondent had previously ascertained that his belief that the Boses would join in the proposed lease was unfounded. On 14th January 1920 he called upon the Maharaja, who represented one of the cosharers, and showed him a copy of the terms. He did not however obtain the signature of the Maharaja. Notwithstanding this, and apparently in the hope that he might yet induce the Maharaja to accept the terms provisionally arranged with the Mittras, he registered the kabuliyat on 24th January and thereafter again called on the Maharaja on 3rd February to induce him to accept the kabuliat, but failed to get him to agree to its terms. A third attempt had the same negative result. On 5th March 1920, he caused his solicitor to write to the appellants to the effect that they and the other cosharers had granted a permanent lease of the property in question and that the Mittras had undertaken to grant the usual amalnamah in his favour and undertook to get the same signed and executed by the Maharaja and Manmatha on behalf of the Boses. This was the first time, so far as the evidence discloses, that this attitude was taken up on his behalf, and it was not adhered to in the plaint of the suit which he raised two years later. This plaint proceeds on the footing that it had been agreed by all the owners of the property in the beginning of January 1920, that they should grant him a lease of the lands in question and the suit was accordingly directed against all the cosharers. He accordingly prayed

"(a) That the defendants be ordered to execute an amalnama in favour of the plaintiff corresponding to the terms of the said kabuliyat executed by the plaintiff and annexed hereto; (b) that the defendants do make over possession to the plaintiff of the said lands and premises."

The leading issues of the case as adjusted by the Subordinate Judge were

"2. Whether all the defendants agreed to the proposal of the plaintiff to take a lease of the land in suit? 3. Had defendants 1-3 any power or authority to make settlement with the plaintiff or to act in that behalf? 4. Was there a valid agreement to lease between the parties? If so what are its terms and is it binding on all the defendants."

All these issues were found against the plaintiff by the learned Subordinate Judge, and 2 and 3, which are issues of fact, have been found against the respondent by the District Judge, whose findings of fact are conclusive. On issue 4, which their Lordships think was at all events in part an issue of law, they are in agreement with the learned Subordinate Judge. The whole actings of the parties, and the conduct of the respondent in particular are wholly inconsistent with the view that is now put forward and was sustained by the District Judge and the High Court, that the appellants undertook a binding obligation to the respondent to lease their own 12-annas share in the lands to him irrespective of what action the other cosharers might take. The point has never been raised in the pleadings of the parties and was only suggested in argument when the respondent's pleader realized that the attitude taken up in the plaint was incapable of proof. The result is that there was no concluded contract of lease with respect to the land in question, the whole negotiations having proceeded on the footing that all the owners of the property would consent to the lease. As the consent of the Boses was never obtained, the negotiations fell to the ground and the Subordinate Judge was right in dismissing the suit.

Even on the assumption that the interpretations put upon the document of 13th January were well founded, their Lordships would have been unable to sustain the view of the learned District Judge and of the High Court, that the respondent was entitled to the relief which has been given him. The suit as framed is obviously one for specific performance and not for a mere declaration of title. The plaintiff prays that the defendants be ordered to execute an amalnama in favour of the plaintiff, corresponding to the terms of the kabuliyat annexed to the plaint. That cannot be done as the kabuliyat is addressed not merely to the appellants, but to the other two defendants, who have never accepted it. They agree with the learned Judges of the High Court that Ss. 14, 16 and 17, Specific Relief Act, have no application to the present case. S.15 however it in these terms :

"Where a party to a contract is unable to perform the whole of his part of it, and the part which must be left unperformed forms a considerable portion of the whole, or does not admit of compensation in money, he is not entitled to obtain a decree for specific performance. But the Court may, at the suit of the other party, direct the party in default to perform specifically so much of his part of the contract as he can perform, provided that the plaintiff relinquishes all claim to further performance, and all right to compensation, either for the deficiency or for the loss or damage sustained by him through the default of the defendant."

And it is upon this that the learned Judges of the High Court proceeded. The

proviso to the section however has been overlooked. The plaintiff has not relinquished all claim to further performance and all right to compensation either for the deficiency or for the loss or damage sustained by him through the default of the defendants. On the contrary, he claimed in his plaint Rs. 600 as loss of profit already suffered and he has obtained a decree for the return of that share of the selami which enured to the 4 anna share. The learned Judges who allowed the appeal on the ground that an important question of law was involved stated this as one of the questions which they thought might properly be submitted to this Board, and their Lordships have thought it right, although in the view that they take of the case it is not necessary for their decision that their opinion should be recorded.

On the whole matter their Lordships will humbly advise His Majesty that the appeal should be sustained and the judgments of the High Court and the District Court recalled with costs, and the judgment of the Subordinate Judge affirmed. Respondent 1 must pay the appellant's costs of the appeal.