

(1997) 01 SC CK 0005
In the Supreme Court Of India
Case No : Civil Appeal No. 316 of 1997

State of Orissa

APPELLANT

Vs

Duti Sahu and others

RESPONDENT

Date of Decision : 13-01-1997

Acts Referred:

Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 — Section 2

Citation : AIR 1997 SC 1040 : (1997) AIRSCW 1034 : (1997) 84 CLT 219 :
(1997) 2 JT 631 : (1997) 1 SCALE 471 : (1997) 3 SCC 501 : (1997) 1 SCR 234 :
(1997) 2 Supreme 11

Hon'ble Judges : K. Ramaswamy, J;G. T. Nanavati, J

Bench : Division Bench

Final Decision : Allowed

Judgement

1. Delay condoned.
2. Leave granted.
3. Heard learned Counsel for the parties.
4. This appeal by special leave arises from the judgment dated March 29, 1996 passed by the Division Bench of the Orissa High Court in O.J.C. No. 1389/96. The admitted position is that the respondents are displaced persons and they sought for and were granted assignment of the land in reserved forest by the State Government on various dates between 1982 and 1985 for cultivation. One of the conditions for the grant was that the trees standing on the land allotted to them "shall be the property of the State Government." It is clear from Section 2 of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 that it contemplates restrictions on the dereservation of forests or use of forest land for non-forest purpose and postulates thus:

Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force in a State, no State Government or other authority shall make, except with the prior approval of the Central Government any order directing -

(i) that any reserved (within the meaning of the expression "reserved forest" in any law for the time being in force in that State) or any portion thereof shall cease to be reserved;

(ii) that any forest land or any portion thereof may be used for any non-forest purpose;

(iii) that any forest land or any portion thereof may be assigned by way of lease or otherwise to any private person or to any authority, corporation, agency or any other organisation not owned, managed or controlled by Government;

(iv) that any forest land or any portion thereof may be cleared of trees which have grown naturally in that land or portion, for the purpose of using it for reafforestation.

5. Having overlooked these crucial statutory provisions, the High Court has directed, by the impugned order, at the behest of the respondents, by way of writ of mandamus, issuance of Timber Transit Permits to the respondents. The question is : whether the impugned direction issued by the High Court is correct in law? Except with prior permission of the Central Government, deforestation is impermissible. It is seen that it cannot be disputed that lands are situated within reserved forest area. In the lands assigned to the petitioner, the trees are standing. In terms of the grant made to them, the trees belong to the Government. Under those circumstances, for the reason that it is a reserved forest area since the grant was made only for the purpose of cultivation the respondents have, no manner of right whatsoever to deforest the land and to cut and carry the trees belonging to the Government much less without the permission of the authority.

6. The appeal is accordingly allowed. The order of the High Court stands set aside. No costs.