

1974 KHC 405

Supreme Court of India

**V. R. Krishna Iyer; R. S. Sarkaria, JJ.*

Suba Singh v. Mahendra Singh and Others

C. A. No. 1318 of 1967

12 October, 1973

Tenancy and Land Laws - Consolidation of Holdings Act, 1954 (U.P.) S.49 -- Jurisdiction of Civil Courts -- Barred in respect of "matters arising out of consolidation proceedings" and "matters in regard to which a suit or application could be filed under the provisions of the Consolidation Act." (Para 5)

JUDGMENT

V. R. Krishna Iyer, J.

1. The appellant was the plaintiff in the munsiff's court, where he brought a suit for partition on the basis that he was the son of Rambhajan, the predeceased son of one Jagram, the owner of the property sought to be divided. The learned munsiff granted a decree but in appeal it was reversed. This dismissal of the suit was reversed. This dismissal of the suit was affirmed in the High Court, and the plaintiff - appellant has come to this Court, urging before us the only point that the civil court had no jurisdiction to decide the question of title, turning on his sonship, which had already been help in his favour by the consolidation authorities under the U. P. Consolidation of Holdings Act 1953 (U. P. Act No. 5 of 1954) hereinafter called, for short, the Act.

2. This being the sole short point involved in this case, the facts may be briefly set out and the law bearing on this question stated. One Jagram had four sons, including Rambhajan. The latter pre deceased the father, having died in 1942. The plaintiff - appellant claims to be the son of Rambhajan Jagram died on 13th March, 1956, and if the plaintiff's claim were correct, as son of a pre deceased son he would be entitled to a 4th share in Jagram's estate together with the 3 surviving sons. The question of fact on which the parties joined issues was as to whether the appellant was the son of Rambhajan at all. In proceedings before the consolidation authorities, his claim for mutation was upheld, but as earlier pointed, his ultimate fate was different in the civil courts. (It is true that the Trial Court has upheld his claim but we are concerned with the final verdict rendered by the High Court which is against the appellant).

3. Having obtained a decision in his favour in the mutation proceedings under the U. P. Land Revenue Act, the plaintiff - appellant naturally contended that it was not open to the civil court to go into this question or set aside the finding. This contention is based on S.27(2) and 49 of the U. P. Consolidation of Holdings Act, 1953. The scheme of that Act, the policy behind that legislation and the language of the relevant provisions clearly show that the legislature did not want questions of title to be decided by the civil court when the consolidation proceedings were under way. It is perfectly plain that the fragmented holding being converted into consolidated parcels of land is a complicated operation to be conducted by administrative authorities, and if long and frequent proceedings in civil courts hold up consolidation operations, the very transformation of land holdings in villages the legislature desired to produce would have been indefinitely postponed and messed up. It is thus obvious that at this stage civil courts should

not intervene even if the question were of heirship or title to property. At the same time, the legislature did not want to hand over these complicated questions of title and the like to mere consolidation agencies, and so under S.12(4) and 22(1) it was provided that objections relating to title to land, if they cropped up at intermediate stages in the course of these operations, were to be referred to arbitration. By S.37, the legislature provided that the arbitrators should be appointed by the State Governments from amongst civil judicial officers or Assistant Collectors of the first class of not less than five years' standing. For the purposes of procedure and speedy disposal, the Arbitration Act of 1940 was also made applicable.

4. The smooth progress unhampered by civil litigation, of consolidation operations, was thus ensured by the provisions of the Act. S.4 thereof marks the commencement of these operations by the publication of a declaration with a view to the proposed scheme of consolidation being made applicable. On such publication, the district or the local area covered by it shall be deemed to be under consolidation operations. The revision and correction of maps and records, essential to end fragmentation and produce consolidation, is provided for in Chapter 2, the preparation of the consolidation scheme is itself provided for under Chapter 3, and the culmination of these consolidation efforts is in the confirmation of the statement of proposal by the Settlement Officer (Consolidation). When such proposals are put forward by the concerned officers, objections are heard and they are disposed of. If any question of title in or over land arises at this stage, that is referred for determination to the statutory arbitrator under S.22. Similarly, at the preliminary stage of the preparation of the statement of plots and tenure holders, if and question of title arises, that also is relegated for decision by the arbitrator (vide S.12(4)). After all these stages are completed, under S.23 of the Act the settlement officer confirms the statement which thereupon becomes final and is published in the village. S.23 declares this statement of consolidation scheme to be final and that means nobody can challenge the provisions in the statement once it is confirmed. The publication of such declaration marks the completion of the substantive phase of the consolidation operations. The jurisdiction of the consolidation authorities to decide, or to get adjudicated questions of title or rights, also comes to an end. Thereafter what is left for Chapter 4 to work out is the enforcement of the scheme which has been confirmed under S.23. The consolidation scheme comes into operation on the date specified by the consolidation officer. Thereafter, the holdings are allotted and the tenure holders or the allottees are entitled to enter into possession of the fields so allotted to them (vide S.26). consequently, under S.27(1), it is provided that the State Government shall issue a notification under S.48 of the U. P. Land Revenue Act, 1901 for preparation of the new village map, khasra and record of rights, in accordance with the scheme confirmed for that village. It is provided - and this is very important - that all entries in the record of rights prepared under sub-section (1) of S.27 and notified under S.48 of the U. P. Land Revenue Act, 1901, shall be final and conclusive. Of course, if the allottee is not able to take possession, the assistant consolidation officer is empowered to deliver such possession. Then there is a comprehensive provision. S.49, which bars the civil court's jurisdiction and runs as follows:

"49. No person shall institute any suit or other proceedings in any civil court with respect to any matter arising out of consolidation proceedings or with respect to any other matter in regard to which a suit or application could be filed under the provisions of this Act."

The anxiety of the legislature that the civil courts shall not unsettle what has been painstakingly settled by the consolidation authorities is understandable.

5. The whole question in the present appeal turns on the ambit and limit of the Civil Court's jurisdiction in the light of S.49. It is well settled that the exclusion of the jurisdiction of the civil court cannot be easily inferred and any provision which takes it away must be construed strictly. We must have this principle in mind when interpreting S.49. Analytically examined, it is clear that the two inhibitory clauses of S.49, are not identical in their scope and effect. The first clause is confined to matters "arising out of consolidation proceedings" under the act, while the second clause is limited to matters "in regard to which a suit or application could be filed under the provisions of this Act".

6. In the present case, the question that had arisen was as to who were the heirs of Jagram. This question was not covered by the first clause, for two reasons: Firstly, it was not a matter arising out of consolidation proceedings but one arising from a vis major i.e. the death of Jagram. The words "out of" in clause 1, must be given their full restrictive effect. They cannot be loosely interpreted and equated with "during". The Legislature appears to have advisedly used these words to restrict the operation of this clause to those matters which are directly connected with the consolidation proceedings and which, but for such proceedings, would not have arisen. Secondly, the question of inheritance to the estate of Jagram arose after the consolidation operations had been substantively completed.

7. It is submitted that Jagram was alive when the proposal under S.23 was finalised. Jagram was held to be a bhoomidar as per the scheme which was confirmed on 29-2-1956. In fact, he dies only in March that year. It is seen from the records that the possession of the various holdings was to be given to the bhoomidars and Jagram was to have taken possession on 26-2-1956 (vide annexure C. Form 23, which discloses that the date had been fixed by the District Magistrate for transferring possession as 29-2-1956 and that all the cultivators were told "that from today the cultivators are declared as agriculturists of the fields mentioned in form No. 25". This contained in annexure C dated 29-2-1956 itself.) it is thus plain that possession also had been given to Jagram and nothing substantial remained to be done in the shape of consolidation operations so far as his parcel of land was concerned. Title, conglomeration, allotment and occupation - practically the whole gamut of consolidation stages was thus covered.

8. There is no provision in the Act for any dispute of title which arises subsequent to confirmation of the statement under S.23 to be decided by way of arbitration or otherwise.

9. Now let us examine whether the matter falls within the exclusionary ambit of clause (2) of S. 49. The question further resolves itself into, whether the consolidation authorities had the jurisdiction to determine finally this complicated question of title when the cause of action had arisen subsequently to the finalisation, publication and even implementation of the consolidation scheme so far as Jagram was concerned. In our opinion the answer to this question must be in the negative. S.27(1) requires the Director of Consolidation to cause soon after the consolidation scheme has come into force, the preparation of the record of rights and other revenue records, but this, in terms of that sub-section, is to be done in accordance with the provisions of the U. P. Land Revenue Act, 1901. According to S.27(3), after the records have been so prepared, their further maintenance will be the responsibility of the Collector, and this, too, is to be done under S.33 of the U. P. Land revenue Act, 1901. It was thus abundantly clear that an application for mutation on the basis of inheritance when the cause of action arose, after the finalisation and publication of the scheme under S.23, is not a matter in regard to which an application could be filed "under the provisions of this Act" within the meaning of clause 2 of S.49. Thus, the other limb of S.49, also is not attracted. The result is that the plea

of bar of the civil courts' jurisdiction to investigate and adjudicate upon the title to the land or the sonship of the plaintiff has no substance. Nothing done in consolidation proceedings is undone by that suit. To urge that the formal notification under S.52 not having been published the court had no jurisdiction is to misread S.49 and to exalt a ritual into a legal reality.

10. We may mention here that the Allahabad High Court has consistently taken this view, See *Smt. Natho v. Board of Revenue, U. P. Allahabad*, 1966 All LJ 563 where this position has been explained. But more clinchingly has this matter been dealt within a recent judgment of that Court in *Smt. Bhuri v. Sunder*, 1973 All LJ 352. We approve of the reasoning therein, in so far as it is in accord with the above observations and hold that there is no merit in this appeal and dismiss it but with no order as to costs in this Court having regard to the totality of circumstances in the case.
