

B.R.T.

APPELLATE CIVIL

Before S. S. Dulat and Prem Chand Pandit, JJ.

MADAN MOHAN,— *Appellant.*

versus

BALKISHAN DAS,— *Respondent.*

Regular First Appeal No. 423 of 1958.

Hindu Law—Joint family property—Karta asking another member of the family to look after certain property—Such member—Whether becomes Karta qua that property—Family property remaining joint—Suit for accounts—Whether lies against the Karta.

1964

October, 27th

Held, that if the Karta of a joint Hindu family asks another member of the family to look after certain property for the time being, that other member does not become the Karta of the family for the purposes of that property. He remains, on the other hand, merely a member of the family to whom a task has been assigned by the Karta and he is for that particular purpose the agent of the Karta and nothing more.

Held, that while Hindu joint family property remains joint, the Managing member that is Karta is not as such accountable to other members and a mere suit for accounts does not lie against him.

Regular First Appeal from the decree of the Court of Shri Charan Singh Tiwana, Sub-Judge, 1st Class, Amritsar, dated the 21st of June, 1958, granting a preliminary decree for accounts in respect of the land in dispute in favour of the plaintiff against the defendant, as prayed in the plaint and also granting the plaintiff a permanent injunction restraining the defendant from interfering in the possession and management of the Joint Hindu Family properties, namely, the land and the property situated at Kalyan Singh Road, Amritsar, but dismissing the plaintiff's suit regarding the business known as "East Punjab Book Depot, Amritsar" the carpets and the household articles, as detailed in para 3 of the plaint and leaving the parties to bear their own costs.

S. K. JAIN AND D. C. GUPTA, ADVOCATES, for the Appellant.

K. C. NAYYAR, AND TIRTH SINGH MUNJRAL, ADVOCATES, for the Respondents.

JUDGMENT

lat, J. DULAT, J.—This appeal arises out of a suit by a father against his son concerning certain items of joint family property of which of course the father is the Karta. The relations between the father and the son got strained largely because the father, Shri Bal Kishan Das, had after the death of his first wife, who was the mother of the defendant Madan Mohan, remarried and has had children from the second wife. The father, being the plaintiff, alleged that an area of agricultural land belonging to the joint family was handed over by him in 1954 to the defendant Madan Mohan for managing it as he himself was not too well just then, but that the defendant Madan Mohan had subsequently refused to render accounts of the income

derived from the agricultural land. The plaintiff, therefore, claimed a decree for accounts. Further, the plaintiff alleged that the defendant was trying to interfere with another joint family property, being a business called the East Punjab Book Depot. The plaintiff also alleged that there was another property belonging to the joint family at Rai Bahadur Kalyan Singh Road, in Amritsar, with which the defendant was unlawfully interfering. The plaintiff, therefore, prayed that apart from a decree for accounts, an injunction should be issued against the defendant restraining him from interfering with the other two properties.

Madan Mohan
v.
Balkishan Das

Dulat, J.

The defendant Madan Mohan, admitted that the agricultural land in question was joint family property but he claimed that the property had been given to him by his father not for merely managing it for the time being, but for his, that is, the defendant's maintenance. His case was that because of strained relations between the parties the father had thought it fit to make over the agricultural land to the defendant in lieu of maintenance and the claim for accounts, therefore, was ill-founded.

Regarding the book-seller's business called the 'East Punjab Book Depot', the defendant claimed that it was his exclusive property and did not belong to the joint family and he alone was, therefore, entitled to run it. Regarding the property at Rai Bahadur Kalyan Singh Road, the defendant alleged that he was in actual possession of two rooms in which he was residing and that as a member of the joint family he was entitled to do so and could not be dispossessed.

The trial Court found on the evidence that the East Punjab Book Depot was the exclusive property of the defendant and the plaintiff's claim in respect of it was unsustainable. Regarding Kalyan Singh Road Property the Court found that the defendant was in occupation of only two rooms and that, as he was entitled to remain in occupation, he could not be dispossessed. There remained the question of agricultural land, 276 *Kanals* and 7 *Marlas* in area, in Rakh Shikargah. The Court found on the evidence that that property belonged to the joint family, as was of course admitted, and further that it was made

Madan Mohan
v.
Balkishan Das
Dulat, J.

over to the defendant by his father merely for management and the defendant's story, that it had been given to him in lieu of his maintenance, was not true. The Court, therefore, held that the defendant was liable to render accounts concerning the income of that property to his father, who was the Karta of the family. In the result, the trial Court granted the plaintiff a preliminary decree for accounts concerning the income from the agricultural land and also granted a permanent injunction to the plaintiff restraining the defendant from interfering in the management or possession of the remaining joint family properties, the injunction being in terms "a permanent injunction restraining the defendant from interfering in the possession and management of the joint Hindu family properties, namely, the land and the property situated at Kalyan Singh Road, Amritsar." The suit regarding the East Punjab Book Depot at Amritsar and certain other movable properties was dismissed and the parties were left to their own costs. Against that decree the defendant has filed the present appeal (Regular First Appeal 423 of 1958) and although at one stage cross-objections were filed on behalf of the plaintiff concerning the part of the claim which was dismissed by the trial Court, those cross-objections appear to have been later withdrawn and we are no longer concerned with them.

Mr. Jain for the defendant-appellant first points out that there is some vagueness about the decree in connection with the property at Kalyan Singh Road in Amritsar. The Court has found that the defendant is lawfully in possession of two rooms and he is entitled to retain those rooms for his residence while the decree seems to restrain the defendant from interfering with the possession of the property in question and this may be taken to mean that the defendant is to be dispossessed of the rooms in his possession. Mr. Nayyar for the plaintiff-respondent admits that that is not the intention of the decree and the defendant-appellant is not to be dispossessed of those two rooms in pursuance of the decree. With this clarification of the meaning of the decree, Mr. Jain is satisfied.

Regarding the East Punjab Book Depot, there is now no dispute before us.

There remains the question of the agricultural land. Mr. Jain contends that the conclusion of fact reached by the trial Court, that this land was given to the defendant-appellant for managing it for some time, is not correct. He has taken us through the entire evidence. It appears, as the trial Court has observed, that only two witnesses have ~~been~~ given clear evidence about the arrangement alleged by the defendant-appellant, that this land was given to him, for his maintenance. These witnesses are Baij Nath, (D.W. 13) and Partap Chand, (D.W. 14). A number of other witnesses also stated vaguely that the land was given to the defendant for his maintenance, but they do not appear to have known this fact directly and their evidence has, therefore, not been relied upon. The trial Court was not impressed by the evidence of Baij Nath, or Partap Chand and for good reasons. Shri Baij Nath, admitted that he had been accused of embezzling money belonging to a co-operative society and there had been a case against him. He also admitted that he was suspended from his office of Sarpanch in connection with that matter. He is not closely related to the parties and no reason appears why any arrangement about joint family property should have been made in his presence. The second witness Partap Chand, (D.W. 14), is interested. The defendant, he admitted, was his old class fellow. He is not a neighbour nor any close relative of the parties. It appeared to the trial Court that if there had been any settlement between the parties concerning the defendant's maintenance and the land had been given to him on that account, there would have been some writing made, and that seems probable. The evidence of the two witnesses, Baij Nath and Partap Chand, does not strike me as particularly reliable. There are two other circumstances which make the defendant's story improbable. The first is that when the plaintiff gave evidence, he clearly stated that the land in dispute was given to the defendant for management only and no suggestion was made to the plaintiff under cross-examination that this was not so, nor was it specifically put to him that there had been any settlement about the defendant's maintenance. The defendant gave evidence subsequently. He stated that there had been such a settlement in the presence of three other witnesses, Shri Amir Chand Gupta, Shri Devki Nandan and Pt. Hans Raj. Shri Amir Chand Gupta, admitted as D.W. 15, that

Madan Mohan
v.
Balkishan Das
Dulat, J.

Madan Mohan
v.
Balkishan Das
Dulat, J.

the arrangement was not made in his presence. Shri Devki Nandan, (D.W. 9), did not say that any such arrangement was made in his presence and on the other hand alleged that he had heard of it from the plaintiff. Curiously enough, the admission of the plaintiff was never put to him when he gave evidence. The third witness, Shri Hans Raj, (D.W. 4), did not support the defendant that any such arrangement was made in his presence. It is clear, therefore, that the arrangement alleged by the defendant was not supported by the witnesses in whose presence it was said to have been made. I am not surprised in the circumstances that the trial Court believed the plaintiff's story that the land in question was given to the defendant merely for managing it for the time being and not in lieu of maintenance, and I can find no justification for disturbing the trial Court's conclusion on that matter.

Mr. Jain, then raises another point which was not specifically raised in the trial Court, but as it is a point of law, we have heard him fully in support of it. His contention is that if the agricultural land was given to the defendant-appellant for being managed by him, the defendant-appellant became *qua* that land the managing member of the joint family and since no suit for accounts lies against the managing member of a joint family property in the absence of a claim for actual partition of the property, no decree for accounts can in the present case be made against the defendant-appellant in respect of the agricultural land. There is no substance in this contention. It is true that while family property remains joint, the managing member, that is, the Karta is not as such accountable to the other members and a mere suit for accounts does not lie against him. It is also true that in certain circumstances the father or the senior most member of the family need not be the Karta or the managing member and a junior member of the family can be appointed or accepted as the Karta. From these two propositions, however, it does not follow that if the Karta of the family asks another member of the family to look after certain property for the time being, that other member becomes the Karta of the family for the purposes of that property. He remains on the other hand merely a member of the family to whom a task has been assigned by the Karta

and he is for that particular purpose the agent of the Karta Madan Mohan and nothing more. If Mr. Jain's submission were to be accepted, it would come to this that every time the managing member of a joint family asks another member to do something in respect of any item of joint family property, that other member would for the purposes of that property be the Karta and not at all answerable for accounts to the other members of the family or the Karta, a position which is hardly tolerable. What has happened in the present case is perfectly clear and it is that the Karta, being ill for the time being, asked his son to look after the agricultural land but that assignment did not and could not in law make the defendant-appellant the Karta of the family for the purposes of that property. He was and remained an agent of his father and consequently liable to render accounts of the income he received from the agricultural land. That seems to me the only reasonable conclusion on the facts and on that conclusion it is impossible to agree that the father was not entitled to demand accounts of the income from the son. In my opinion, therefore, the preliminary decree for accounts has been properly made.

Madan Mohan
v.
Balkishan Das
Dulat, J.

The result is that apart from the clarification in the decree which I have mentioned, there is no ground for any interference with the decree granted by the trial Court and I would, therefore, dismiss the appeal, but direct that, as in the trial Court, the parties will in this Court also bear their own costs.

P. C. PANDIT, J.—I agree.

Pandit, J.

K.S.K.