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DELHI ADMINISTRATION
v.
GURDIP SINGH UBAN AND ORS. ETC.

AUGUST 20, 1999

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[SUJATA V. MANOHAR AND M. JAGANNADHA RAO, JJ.]

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Land Acquisition Act, 1894—Sections 4(1), 5A, 6—Quashing of the declaration under Section 6 in certain cases by the High Court on the ground that Section 5A inquiry was vitiated—Subsequently respondents claiming in another writ petition that such quashing would also enure to their benefit despite not having filed objections under Section 5A—Held, in respect of those who did not object to Section 4(1) notification by filing objections under Section 5A, the said notification and declaration under Section 6 therein must be deemed to be in force—Quashing the notification in the cases of individual writ petitions cannot be treated as quashing the whole of it.

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A notification under Section 4(1) of the Land Acquisition Act was issued on 25-11-1980 in respect of 50,000 bighas of land in 13 villages in Delhi. A declaration under Section 6 was published around 5 years later, on 7-6-1985.

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The said declaration under Section 6 was challenged by way of several writ petitions in the High Court. On reference, the Full Bench by its order dated 25-7-1987 upheld the notification under Section 4(1) and declaration made under Section 6. The Full Bench negated the contention that the declaration was time barred having been issued more than 3 years after the notification.

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It held that the scheme for which the land was acquired was an integrated one and the stay orders even if obtained in individual cases necessarily resulted in precluding any further proceedings under Section 6. The said petitions were sent back to the Division Bench for decision on the other points raised. The Division Bench by its judgment dated 18-11-88 allowed the writ petitions thereby quashing the Section 6 declaration. The said judgment was not

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appealed against by the Delhi Administration.

Another writ petition was filed before the High Court on 23-4-1986 for quashing the aforesaid notification dated 25-11-1980 and the declaration dated 7-6-1985. The Division Bench by its judgment dated 17-12-1996 allowed the said writ petition. It held that the earlier judgment dated 18-11-1988

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resulted in the entirety of the Section 6 declaration being quashed and was a judgement in rem and hence the petitioners therein could rely on that judgment even though they had not filed any objections under Section 5A. Against the aforesaid judgement, the Delhi Administration has preferred the present appeals. A

On behalf of the appellants, it was contended that the result of Section 6 declaration being quashed would be that the Section 4(1) notification would also lapse. It was further contended that in a similar case decided by a Three Judge Bench in respect of the same group of notifications it was held that in the case of owners who had not filed objections under Section 5A, they could not take advantage of the judgment of the Division Bench dated 18-11-1988 ; and that upon a proper understanding of the judgment of the Division Bench dated 18-11-88, it could not be held that the entirety of the Section 6 notification stood quashed by the said judgement. B C

On behalf of the respondents, it was contended that the notification could not remain partially stayed or partially suspended and it was clear from the language employed in judgment of the Division Bench dated 18-11-1988 that the entire Section 6 declaration had been quashed. D

Allowing the appeals, the Court

HELD :1.1. Quashing the notification in the case of individual writ petitions cannot be treated as quashing the whole of it. In connection with owners or persons interested who have not filed objections under section 5A of the Land Acquisition Act in principle, it must be accepted that they had no objection to Section 4 notification operating in respect of their property. On the other hand, in respect of those who filed objections, they might have locus standi to contend that Section 5A inquiry was not conducted properly. Those who have not filed objections under Section 5A could not be allowed to contend that the Section 5A inquiry was bad and that consequently Section 6 declaration must be struck down and that the Section 4 notification would lapse. In respect of those who did not object to the Section 4 notification and the Section 6 declaration by filing objections under Section 5A, the said notification and the declaration must be treated as being in force. The writ petitioners cannot be permitted to contend that in some other cases, the notification was quashed and that such quashing would also enure to their benefit. [655-H; 656-A-D] E F G

1.2. It is true that in *Sudan Singh's* case a Two Judge Bench of this H

- A** court confirmed another judgement of the Delhi High Court wherein the High Court had allowed the writ petition on the basis that the judgment of the Division Bench dated 18-11-1988 had quashed the Section 6 declaration wholly. It is also true that in *Sudan Singh's* case too no objections were filed by the owners under Section 5A. But, the present case would be governed
- B** by the judgment of the Three Judge Bench in *Abhey Ram's* case where the said bench not only referred to the effect of the Division Bench judgment of the High Court dated 18.11.1988 but also referred to the judgement of the Two Judge Bench of this court in *Sudan Singh's* case. The Three Judge Bench in *Abhey Ram* is binding on the Court in preference to the judgment of two judges in *Sudan Singh*. The opinion of the legal department of
- C** Government or the Delhi Development Authority which is relied upon—apart from not having binding force, cannot override *Abhey Ram's* case.

[655-E-G]

Abhey Ram & Ors. v. Union of India, JT (1997) 5 SC 354, followed.

- D** *B.R. Gupta v. Union of India* 37 (1989) DLT 150; *Balak Ram Gupta v. Union of India*, AIR (1987) DELHI 239; *N. Narasimhaiah v. State of Karnataka*, [1996] 3 SCC 88; *Delhi Development Authority v. Sudan Singh*, (1991) DLT 602(SC) = [1997] SCC 430, referred to and *Oxford English School v. Govt. of Tamil Nadu*, [1995] 5 SCC 206, held inapplicable.

- E** CIVIL APPELLATE JURISDICTION : Civil Appeal No. 4656 of 1999 Etc.

From the Judgment and Order dated 17.12.96 of the Delhi High Court in W.P. No. 920 of 1986.

- F** Ravinder and V.B. Saharya, for M/s. Saharya & Co., Ms. Geeta Luthra and D.N. Goburdhan, for the Appellant.

P.N. Lekhi, M.K. Garg and Subhash Mittal for the Respondent.

Arun Khosla and S. Rajappa for the Respondent No. 3.

- G** The Judgment of the Court was delivered by

M. JAGANNADHA RAO, J. Leave granted.

- H** These two Civil Appeals have been filed by the Delhi administration against the judgment of the Delhi High Court in C.W.P. No. 920 of 1986 dated 17.12.1996. The respondents are the owners of an extent of about 2.50 acres

in Chattrapur village. The notifications, in fact, covered land of an extent of about 50,000 Bighas in thirteen villages. The Writ petition was allowed under the impugned judgment and the notifications were quashed. A

The brief facts of the case are follows:

The Notification under Section 4(1) of the Land Acquisition Act was issued on 25.11.1980 while the declaration under Section 6 was published on 7.6.1985. Initially, the declaration under Section 6 was challenged in C.W.P. No.1639 of 1985 and 76 other writ petitions and were referred to a Full Bench of the Delhi High Court on a certain legal issue. The Full Bench decided the point and upheld the Section 6 declaration. The contention before the Full Bench was that the declaration under Section 6 was issued more than 3 years after the Section 4(1) notification and was, therefore, bad in law. The submission was that even though there were various stay orders in several Writ petitions by the High Court in relation to the operation of the Section 6 declaration, they were all individual orders passed in the cases of various Writ petitioners and hence these orders could not be treated as amounting to a suspension of the entire Section 6 declaration and hence the said declaration must be struck down as time barred in respect of others who did not obtain stay orders. The Full Bench of the High Court rejected the above contention holding that the scheme for which the land was acquired was an integrated one and the stay orders even if obtained in individual cases necessarily resulted in precluding any further proceedings being taken under the Section 6 declaration. Excluding the time covered by the stay orders, the Section 6 declaration must, it was held, be deemed to have been issued in time. On that reasoning, the notification under Section 4(1) and Section 6 were declared valid by the Full Bench. The other points raised by individual Writ petitioners, namely that the inquiry under Section 5A was vitiated etc., were not decided by the Full Bench and for that purpose the matters were sent back to a Division Bench. The judgment of the Full Bench dated 25.7.87 is reported in *Balak Ram Gupta v. Union of India*, AIR 1987 Delhi 239. Thereafter, the 73 matters were listed before a Division Bench which finally disposed of the writ petitions by a separate judgment reported as *B.R. Gupta v. Union of India* on 18.11.1988 (37 (1989) DLT 150). The Writ petitions were allowed and the Section 6 declaration was quashed on the ground that the Section 5A inquiry was vitiated etc. (There is dispute as to whether the declaration was wholly quashed). The said judgment was not appealed against by the Delhi Administration. The present Writ petition was filed on 23.4.1986 for quashing the same notification dated 25.11.1980 and 7.6.1985 issued under Sections 4(1) and 6. It related to Khasra Nos. 704/1, 706/2, 706/3, 707/2, 714, 715/2, 909/2, H

A 10/2 and 693.

When the present Writ petition came up for hearing before a Division Bench on 17.12.1996, the writ petitioners contended that by the judgment of the Division Bench rendered in B.R. Gupta dated 18.11.88 - i.e. after the Full Bench judgment dated 25.7.87 - the entire Section 6 declaration stood quashed and that even though these writ petitioners (respondents in these Civil Appeals) had not filed any objections under Section 5A of the Act, they were entitled to rely upon the earlier Division Bench judgment of 18.11.88 and contend that the entire Section 6 declaration was quashed. This contention was accepted by the Division Bench under the impugned judgment dated 17.12.1996. The Division Bench held that the earlier judgment resulted in the entirety of the Section 6 declaration being quashed and was a judgment in rem and hence the writ petitioners could rely on that judgment even though they had not filed any objections under Section 5A. The result, according to the appellants, of Section 6 declaration being quashed would be that the Section 4(1) notification would also lapse. It is against the above judgment that the Delhi Administration has preferred these appeals.

In these appeals, the learned counsel for the appellant Ms. Geeta Luthra contended before us that in a similar appeal preferred to this Court decided by a three Judge Bench in *Abhey Ram and Ors. v. Union of India* J.T. (1997) 5 SC 354, in respect of the same group of notifications it was held that in the case of owners who had not filed objections under Section 5A, they could not take advantage of the judgment of the Division Bench in B.R.Gupta's case dated 18.11.1988. It was also held that upon a proper understanding of the judgment of the Division Bench dated 18.11.1988, it could not be held that the entirety of the Section 6 notification stood quashed by the said judgment. The above contention of the learned counsel for the Delhi Administration was supported by the learned senior counsel for the Delhi Development Authority, Sri Ravinder Sethi.

On the other hand, it was contended by Sri P.N. Lekhi, learned senior counsel for the respondents (Writ petitioners) that the Division Bench of the High Court in its impugned judgment was right in holding that the Division Bench in B.R. Gupta's case, in its judgment dated 18.11.1988, had quashed the entire Section 6 declaration and this was clear from the language employed in that judgment. The appellant could not be permitted to blow hot and cold for, in order to say that the Section 6 declaration was not time barred, the appellant had contended before the Full Bench in B.R.Gupta's case that stay orders obtained by some would amount to stay of the entire Section 6

declaration and that on the same parity of reasoning, the subsequent judgment of the Division Bench in B.R. Gupta's case must be deemed to have quashed the entirety of the Section 6 declaration. A passage in the Full Bench judgment that the notification could not remain partially stayed or partially suspended was also relied upon. Reference was also made to another judgment of this Court in *Delhi Development Authority v. Sudan Singh*, (1991) D.L.T. 602 SC = (1997) 5 SCC 430 dated 20.9.91 where a two Judge Bench of this Court upheld another judgment of the High Court. In that case, as in the present case before us, the High Court had allowed the Writ petition filed by Sudan Singh who had contended that the entire Section 6 declaration was quashed by the Division Bench in B.R. Gupta's case in the judgment dated 18.11.88. Sudan Singh did not also file objection under Section 5A. It was argued that in *Abhey Ram's* case decided by the three Judge Bench on 22.4.97, though *Sudan Singh's* case was referred to, the appropriate paragraphs were not noticed. The appropriate paragraphs in the Division Bench judgment in B.R. Gupta's case dated 18.11.88 were also not noticed. In yet another case relating to one B.L. Sharma, another writ petition, C.W.P. 2365/90 was allowed on 6.12.90 and special leave petition (C) 3604/92 was dismissed by this Court following the judgment in Sudan Singh's case. It is also contended that in the letter of the Joint Secretary dated 31.3.1989, the legal opinion obtained by the department was that the judgment of the Division Bench dated 18.11.88 would cover cases where land was not taken possession of - as in the present case. It is accepted that the respondent did not file objections under Section 5A but it is said that this was because he was an Army Officer who at that time was working in the forward areas.

We may state that it is true that in Sudan Singh's case a two Judge Bench of this Court confirmed another judgment of the Delhi High Court wherein the High Court had allowed the writ petition on the basis that the judgment of the Division Bench dated 18.11.1988 had quashed the Section 6 declaration wholly. It is also true that in Sudan Singh's case too no objections were filed by the owners under section 5A. But, we are governed by the judgment of the three Judge Bench in *Abhey Ram's* case where the said Bench not only referred to the effect of the Division Bench judgment of the High Court dated 18.11.88 but also referred to the judgment of the two Judge Bench of this Court in Sudan Singh's case. The three Judge Bench in *Abhey Ram* is binding on us in preference to the judgment of two Judges in Sudan Singh.

In connection with owners or persons interested who have not filed

A objections under Section 5A, in principle, it must be accepted that they had no objection to Section 4 notification operating in respect of their property. On the other hand, in respect of those who filed objections, they might have locus standi to contend that Section 5A inquiry was not conducted properly. We, therefore, agree in principle with the view of the three Judge Bench in *Abhey Ram's* case that those who have not filed objections under Section 5A, could not be allowed to contend that the Section 5A inquiry was bad and that consequently Section 6 declaration must be struck down and that then the section 4 notification would lapse. If, therefore, no objections were filed by the respondents, logically the Section 6 declaration must be deemed to be in force so far as they are concerned.

C But learned senior counsel for the respondents contends that the judgment of the Division Bench dated 18.11.1988 in B.R. Gupta's case had quashed the entire Section 5A proceedings and that even in case the respondents had filed objections, the position would not have been different. We cannot accept this contention. We are of the view that in respect of those who did not object to the Section 4(1) notification by filing objections under Section 5A, the said notification must be treated as being in force. The writ petitioners cannot be permitted to contend that in some other cases, the notification was quashed and that such quashing would also enure to their benefit.

E Then coming to the effect of the judgment of the Division Bench dated 18.11.88 of the High Court, we are of the view that the three Judge Bench judgment in *Abhey Ram's* case has interpreted or declared the effect of the said High Court judgment dated 18.11.88. That judgment is binding on us. We cannot go by the two Judge Bench judgment in *Sudan Singh's* case because we are bound by the judgment of the three Judge Bench in *Abhey Ram's* case. Further, the judgment in *Abhey Ram's* case takes notice of *Sudan Singh's* case and it cannot be contended that they have not looked fully into the judgment in *Sudan Singh's* case or fully into the judgment of the Division Bench of the High Court dated 18.11.88 in B.R.Gupta's case. Nor is the dismissal of the special leave petition in B.L.Sharma's case a precedent which can outweigh *Abhey Ram*. The opinion of the legal department of Government or the Delhi Development Authority which is relied upon - apart from not having binding force, cannot override *Abhey Ram's* case.

H Reliance was then placed by the learned senior counsel for the respondents on *Oxford English School v. Govt. of Tamil Nadu*, [1995] 5 SCC

206) but it has no relevance to the question before us viz whether a notification under Section 6 can be upheld in respect of only some of the lands covered by it. Also a three Judge Bench in *N. Narasimhaiah v. State of Karnataka* [1996] 3 SCC 88 has held that the said judgment has been rendered per incuriam. So far as the other contention that the Government cannot blow hot and cold, we are of the view that the reasoning given by the Full Bench in its judgment dated 25.7.87 was confined to the question whether Section 6 declaration was time barred. The Court held that as the scheme was an integrated one, stay of parts of it precluded the authorities from going ahead with the entire section 6 declaration. That reasoning cannot help the respondents to contend that the same thing would apply to the quashing of the declaration by the Division Bench in its judgment dated 18.11.1988. Quashing the notification in the cases of individual writ petitions cannot be treated as quashing the whole of it. That was what was held in *Abhey Ram's* case. The main points raised before us are fully covered by the judgment of the three Judge Bench in *Abhey Ram's* case.

For the aforesaid reasons, these Civil Appeals are allowed and the judgment of the High Court is set aside and the Writ petition is dismissed. There will be no order as to costs.

M.P.

Appeals allowed.