

PRIVY COUNCIL.

*Present : Lord Thankerton, Sir Lancelot Sanderson and
Lord Normand (Lord President of the Court
of Session).*

SUNDER SINGH-MALLAH SINGH SANATAN
DHARAM HIGH SCHOOL TRUST,
INDAURA—Appellants,

versus

THE MANAGING COMMITTEE, SUNDER
SINGH-MALLAH SINGH RAJPUT
HIGH SCHOOL, INDAURA,
AND OTHERS—Respondents.

Privy Council Appeal No. 62 of 1936.

On appeal from the High Court at Lahore.

Specific Relief Act (I of 1877), S. 42, proviso — Suit for declaration of title without claim for possession — Defendant not in possession — Maintainability of suit — Injunction, whether further relief — Societies Registration Act (XXI of 1860) SS. 1, 2 and 19 — Memorandum of Association — Certified Copies — Signature on originals, Onus of proof.

Where the defendant is not in possession and no further relief is available against the defendant, a suit for a declaration of title to property without a claim to possession will lie.

Where it is not open to the plaintiff to pray for possession against the defendant, injunction is a further relief within the proviso to section 42 of the Act.

Copies of Rules, Regulations and Memorandum of Association certified under section 19 of the Societies Registration Act are *prima facie* evidence of the matters therein contained and give rise to the presumption that the Memorandum of Association was duly signed by the persons by whom it purports to have been signed. The onus is, therefore, on the person who wishes to displace the presumption to call for the original documents and prove the signatures thereon were not genuine.

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Appeal (No. 62 of 1936) from a decree of the High Court (May 31, 1934) which reversed a decree of the Senior Subordinate Judge of Kangra (December 19, 1927).

The material facts are stated in the judgment of the Judicial Committee.

1937, November 16, 18 and 19. MAJID and Mr. CLARK, for the appellants.

EDDY, K. C. and McDONNELL, for the Respondents.

The judgment of the Judicial Committee was delivered by—

LORD THANKERTON.—This is an appeal from a decree of the High Court of Judicature at Lahore, dated the 31st May, 1934, which reversed a decree of the Senior Subordinate Judge, Kangra at Dharamsala, dated the 19th December, 1927.

The respondents, the Managing Committee Sunder Singh-Mallah Singh Rajput High School, hereinafter referred to as "the Committee," filed the suit through Kharak Singh, member of the Committee and Manager of the School, and Chaudri Ram Singh, a member of the Committee, on the 8th November, 1926, and impleaded as defendants Sunder Singh-Mallah Singh Sanatan Dharam Rajput High School Trust, hereinafter referred to as "the Trust," through ten named trustees, of whom Rai Bahadur Chaudri Mallah Singh was the first named.

In the plaint the respondents claimed (a) a declaration to the effect that "the plaintiff-Committee is the managing body, trustee and administrator of Sundar Singh-Mallah Singh Rajput High School, Indaura, that the defendants have no connection whatsoever with this school or its property, nor have they

any right as trustees or administrators in the said school, that the plaintiff alone is the trustee and administrator of this property, in the interests of the said school, and that he alone is entitled to the income and authorised to spend it." and (b) a perpetual injunction against interference by the defendants.

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The property claimed was detailed as follows.

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" 1. Rs.95,000 on fixed deposit in the Punjab National Bank, Lahore.

" 2. War Bonds of the value of Rs.5,000 also deposited with the said Bank.

" 3. Bonds, mortgage deeds and promissory notes, of the value of Rupees one lakh, and

" 4. Lands and school buildings, etc., mentioned in a list attached to the plaint."

The Trust through the trustees filed its Jawab-i-Dawa, denying the right of the plaintiff to any relief, and, on the pleadings the Subordinate Judge framed the following issues:—

" (1) Whether a suit for a declaration lies?

" (2) Whether the plaintiff Managing Committee has *locus standi* to maintain the suit and has duly authorised Kharak Singh and Ram Singh to institute the suit?

" (3) Whether the plaintiff Committee is not a duly registered body?

" (4) Whether the management for the School and its properties became vested in the plaintiff Committee as trustees?

" (5) What is the nature and the extent of the properties up to the date of the new trust, dated the 26th November, 1925?

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MALLAH SINGH been transferred to them?
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DHARAM HIGH “ (7) Whether on 26th November, 1925, the de-
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v. ants in connection therewith? ”
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SUNDER SINGH- After considering the oral and documentary evi-
MALLAH SINGH dence, the learned Judge decided each of the issues in
RAJPUT HIGH favour of the defendants, and dismissed the suit.
SCHOOL, On appeal, this judgment was reversed by the High
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favour, declaring that the Indaura High School
buildings and the lands attached to them, the sum of
Rs.95,000 and war bonds for Rs.5,000, and the mort-
gagee's rights under a deed of mortgage, dated the
2nd June, 1920, in favour of the Indaura School, are
property held in trust for the benefit of the School,
and that the Committee have the right to manage the
School and to manage this property for the purposes
of the School. A perpetual injunction was granted
against the interference of the defendants. The
present appeal is against that decree.

This regrettable litigation had its origin in the following circumstances:—Chaudri Mallah Singh, who was anxious to make suitable provision for the education of the youths of his community, had for long maintained a primary school in his village Indaura.. In 1919, being anxious to extend this institution and to put its management into the hands of a representative committee of the Rajput community, sixteen leading Rajputs were selected and constituted into a committee for the management of the school. Rules and Regulations and a Memorandum were drawn up

and filed and registered under the Societies Registration Act (Act 21 of 1860), the association being registered as Sundar Singh-Mallah Singh Rajput High School, and the sixteen selected Rajputs being named as the Managing Committee, the first named being Mallah Singh as President. Rule 4 provided that all the moveable and immoveable property of the school should vest in the Managing Committee, but no specific properties were mentioned, and no deed of endowment was drawn up.

As many of the members of the Committee lived at some distance from the school, their attendances do not appear to have been at all regular, and there seems little doubt that Mallah Singh took the main burden of management. In 1925, apparently regarding himself as still having a free hand, and having formed the desire to further extend the institution into a college, Mallah Singh executed on the 26th November, 1925, the deed of trust in favour of the defendant-appellants, whose attempt to enter on their duties at the school roused the respondent Committee. This led to intervention of the police and proceedings under sections 144 and 145 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which were started on the 11th May, 1926. Eventually the parties agreed to leave the school and its properties in the possession of Mallah Singh, and to seek their remedy in the Civil Court. As the trial Judge points out, this possession of Mallah Singh was his personal possession and was not in his capacity as President of either the Committee or the Trust. The present suit was thereafter brought on the 8th November, 1926.

With this preliminary outline, the various issues may be taken in turn.

Issue No.1 raises a question under section 42 of the Specific Relief Act 1877, and, in particular, the

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proviso, which precludes the granting of a declaration "where the plaintiff, being able to seek further relief than a mere declaration of title, omits to do so." The Subordinate Judge held that a suit of declaration did not lie, on the ground that the plaintiff was neither in possession nor in control of the management of the school and that the proper form of the suit would have been one for possession and management of the school and not merely a declaration of such right, and that the plaintiff had omitted to seek this further relief. The High Court took the contrary view, on the ground that the defendants were not in possession or in a position to deliver possession of the properties, and that therefore there was no further relief available to the plaintiffs against the defendants. Their Lordships agree with the High Court in this view; and it may be added that where it is not open to the plaintiff to pray for possession also as against the defendant, injunction is further relief within the meaning of the proviso; see Pollock and Mulla on the Specific Relief Acts (6th edn.) at p. 853, and authorities there cited.

Issue No. 3 and the first part of Issue No. 2 raise the same question as to the validity of the registration of the Committee under the Act of 1860, the relevant sections of which are as follows,

"I. Any seven or more persons associated for any Literary, Scientific, or Charitable purpose, or for any such purpose as is described in Section XX of this Act, may, by subscribing their names to a Memorandum of Association, and filing the same with the Registrar of Joint-Stock Companies under Act XIX of 1857, form themselves into a Society under this Act.

“ II. The Memorandum of Association shall contain the following things (that is to say)—

“ The name of the Society.

“ The objects of the Society.

“ The names, addresses, and occupations of the Governors, Council, Directors, Committee, or other governing body to whom, by the Rules of the Society, the management of its affairs is entrusted. A copy of the Rules and Regulations of the Society, certified to be a correct copy by not less than three of the members of the governing body, shall be filed with the Memorandum of Association.

“ III. Upon such Memorandum and certified copy being filed, the Registrar shall certify under his hand that the Society is registered under this Act. There shall be paid to the Registrar for every such registration a fee of fifty Rupees, or such smaller fee as the Governor-General of India in Council may from time to time direct; and all fees so paid shall be accounted for to Government.

“ V. The property, moveable and immoveable, belonging to a Society registered under this Act, if not vested in trustees, shall be deemed to be vested, for the time being, in the governing body of such Society, and in all proceedings, Civil and Criminal, may be described as the property of the governing body of such Society by their proper title.

“ VI. Every Society registered under this Act may sue or be sued in the name of the President, Chairman or Principal Secretary or Trustees, as shall be determined by the Rules and Regulations of the Society, and in default of such determination, in the

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name of such person as shall be appointed by the governing body for the occasion; provided that it shall be competent for any person having a claim or demand against the Society, to sue the President or Chairman, or Principal Secretary or the Trustees thereof, if on application to the governing body some other Officer or person be not nominated to be the defendant.

“XVI. The governing body of the Society shall be the Governors, Council, Directors, Committee, Trustees, or other body to whom by the Rules and Regulations of the Society the management of its affairs is entrusted.

“XIX. Any person may inspect all documents filed with the Registrar under this Act on payment of a fee of one Rupee for each inspection; and any person may require a copy or extract of any document or any part of any document, to be certified by the Registrar, on payment of two annas for every hundred words of such copy or extract; and such certified copy shall be *prima facie* evidence of the matters therein contained in all legal proceedings whatever.”

The learned Subordinate Judge held that the Committee was not duly registered, but his decision is vitiated by his failure to give effect to section 19. He placed the burden of proving the seven signatures to the original memorandum on the plaintiffs, and held that, in the absence of such proof, he could not hold that the Association was duly registered. The High Court reversed this finding, and held that the defendants had failed to disprove the presumption arising on the certificate of the Registrar, dated the 7th December, 1919. Their Lordships are of opinion that the presumption arises, not on the certificate of registration granted by the Registrar under section 3, but on

the copies of the Rules and Regulations and Memorandum, certified under section 19, which constitutes them *prima facie* evidence of the matters therein contained. The only evidence by which the appellants sought to overcome the presumption was that of Kharak Singh under cross-examination, when he stated :

“ I did not see the original Articles of Association (nor sign them) sent to Registrar. Nor can I tell about the other trustees as to whether they signed or not. I do not know whether Kirpa Ram sent on the letter of consent to the Registrar. . . . Barring the letter of consent I sent no other application or paper to Registrar. I cannot say with regard to this matter anything about Chaudri Sahib. I cannot say who produced the Articles of Association before the Registrar.”

Whatever one might think probable, it is left uncertain whether this witness was referring to the Memorandum as the Articles of Association; counsel were unable to inform their Lordships definitely what was the reason of the brackets round the words “ nor sign them.” If the defendants really desired to displace the presumption in this respect, it was clearly their duty to seek to recover the original Memorandum and to put the signature thereon to the witness. Their Lordships are therefore of opinion that the Association was duly registered and had therefore *locus standi* to maintain the suit.

There remains the question under the latter part of issue No.2, whether Kharak Singh and Ram Singh were duly authorised to institute the suit. It is now admitted that the minute of meeting of the Managing Committee, dated the 31st July, 1926, constitutes *ex facie* a due authority to Kharak Singh and Ram

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Singh to institute the suit, but the appellants main-
tained (a) that the respondents had failed to discharge
the burden of proof laid on them by section 106 of the
Evidence Act, in that they had not proved that due
notices of the meeting had been given to the members
of the Committee, and (b) that, in any event, it had
not been proved by the evidence of Kharak Singh and of
Mallah Singh that they had not received such notices.
Their Lordships agree with the High Court that the
evidence of Mallah Singh is unreliable, and the evi-
dence of Kharak Singh does not prove anything as to
the notices. But their Lordships are of opinion that
the proof of the minute of meeting is sufficient to dis-
charge any burden on the respondents, and that the
appellants were bound to give notice in their plead-
ings if they were going to raise this point and to have
had an issue framed on it. The only point taken by
the appellants in their pleadings was that they were
not bound by the resolution, as, after the creation of
the Trust, the Committee ceased to have any existence
in law, and issue No. 2 is not apt to put this question
in issue. Their Lordships therefore hold that the ap-
pellants are not now entitled to raise this question.

Issues Nos. 4 and 6 are conveniently taken to-
gether. The first question is whether the school build-
ings and the land attached to them, as they stood at
the time of the registration of the Association, became
irrevocably vested in the Managing Committee.

The High Court state :

“ It is not disputed that for the foundation of a
charitable endowment by a Hindu in this province no
writing is required. What is necessary is that the
purpose be clearly specified and that the property in-
tended for the endowment should be set apart as dedi-
cated to that purpose. It is necessary that the donor

should divest himself of the property. Whether he has done so is to be determined by his subsequent acts and conduct. All these propositions are well established. It is not disputed that a valid endowment once created cannot be revoked by the donor."

Their Lordships agree with this statement, except that the evidence of divestiture may be contemporaneous, as in this case, and, in such a case, the subsequent acts and conduct of the donor are irrelevant and cannot reinvest him. Their Lordships agree with the High Court that the Subordinate Judge wrongly laid stress on the subsequent alleged neglect of their duties by members of the Committee.

The appellants sought to maintain that the propositions were qualified in the present case by some customary law; but, if so, the appellants were bound to plead it and put it in issue, which has not been done. In the opinion of their Lordships, Rule 4 of the Rules and Regulations, to which Mallah Singh was a party, taken along with sections 5 and 16 of the Act of 1860, was sufficient to vest the buildings of the school and the attached lands, as they then existed, in the Committee. The Subordinate Judge himself has found that the Committee appointed its office-bearers "and the management of the school was made over to them." It must be remembered that the Trusts Act of 1882 does not apply to charitable endowments. Their Lordships are therefore of opinion, in agreement with the High Court, that the school buildings and attached lands were irrevocably dedicated by Mallah Singh at the time of the registration of the Association, and, further, that any subsequent alteration of these buildings or additions to them, must be held to have accrued to the original dedication.

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As regards the fixed deposit of Rs.95,000 and the Rs.5,000 of war bonds, the letter of Mallah Singh to the Punjab National Bank, dated the 18th November, 1922, which included the resolutions of the Managing Committee, and enclosed a copy of the Rules and Regulations, affords ample evidence of dedication and divestiture in favour of the Committee of these two properties. If further evidence were needed, Mallah Singh's letter of the 21st March, 1924, to Kirpa Ram, an officer of the Committee, affords corroboration.

The deed of mortgage by Anup Singh and others, dated the 2nd June, 1920, states " We have mortgaged, without possession, the aforesaid land to the High School, Indaura, Tahsil Nurpur, started in the name of Sardar Chaudri Sundar Singh and Rai Sahib Chaudri Mallah Singh, residents of Indaura, Tahsil Nurpur, for Rs.6,000, half of which comes to Rs.3,000, and have received the mortgage-money from Rai Sahib Chaudri Mallah Singh as per detail given below." Their Lordships agree with the High Court that this constitutes a clear dedication of the mortgagees' rights to the School, with consequent vesting in the Committee.

This renders it unnecessary to consider separately issues Nos.5 and 7.

It follows that the appeal fails, and their Lordships will humbly advise His Majesty that the decree of the High Court should be affirmed and that the appeal should be dismissed with costs.

C. S. S.

Appeal dismissed.

Solicitors for the appellants : *Francis & Harker.*

Solicitors for the respondents : *Nehra & Co.*