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Y. ABRAHAM AJITH AND ORS.
v.
INSPECTOR OF POLICE, CHENNAI AND ANR.

AUGUST 17, 2004

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[ARIJIT PASAYAT AND C.K. THAKKER, JJ.]

Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973:

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Section 177—"Ordinarily"—Meaning of—Held: The word "ordinarily" indicates that the provision is a general one and must be read subject to the provisions contained in the Code—The exception implied by the word "ordinarily" need not be limited to those specially provided for by law.

D

Section 177—Place of trial—Held: It is the place where the offence is committed—In essence it is the cause of action for initiation of the proceedings against the accused.

E

Section 177—"Cause of action"—Implication of—Held: In criminal cases cause of action refers to the local jurisdiction where the offence is committed.

F

Section 178(c)—"Continuing offence"—Meaning of—Held: Is one which is susceptible of continuance and is distinguishable from the one which is committed once and for all.

Words & Phrases:

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"Ordinarily"—Meaning of—In the context of Section 177 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1978.

"Continuing offence"—Meaning of—In the context of Section 178(c) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1978.

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Respondent No. 2 filed a complaint against the appellants alleging commission of offences punishable under Sections 498-A and 406 of the

Penal Code, 1860. After investigation a charge-sheet was filed against the appellants before the Metropolitan Magistrate. At this stage the appellants filed an application before the High Court under Section 482 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 alleging that the Magistrate had no jurisdiction to entertain the complaint as no part of the cause of action arose within the jurisdiction of the Court where the complaint was filed. The High Court dismissed the application. Hence the appeal.

On behalf of respondent No. 2, it was contended that the offences were continuing in terms of Section 178(c) of the Code and, therefore, the Court had jurisdiction to entertain the complaint.

Allowing the appeal, the Court

HELD: I.I. Use of the word “ordinarily” in Section 177 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 indicates that the provision is a general one and must be read subject to the special provisions contained in the Code. [609-G-H; 610-A]

1.2. The exception implied by the word “ordinarily” need not be limited to those specially provided for by the law and exceptions may be provided by law on consideration or may be implied from the provisions of law permitting joint trial of offences by the same Court. No such exception is applicable to the case at hand. [610-B]

Purushottamdas Dalmia v. State of West Bengal, AIR (1961) SC 1589, *L.N. Mukherjee v. State of Madras*, AIR (1961) SC 1601, *Banwarilal Jhunjunwalla v. Union of India*, AIR (1963) SC 1620 and *Mohan Baitha v. State of Bihar*, [2001] 4 SCC 350, relied on.

2. Continuing offence is one which is susceptible of continuance and is distinguishable from the one which is committed once and for all; that it is one of those offences which arises out of the failure to obey or comply with a rule or its requirement and which involves a penalty, liability continues till compliance, that on every occasion such disobedience of non-compliance occurs or recurs, there is the offence committed. [610-C-D]

A *State of Bihar v. Deokaran Nenshi*, AIR (1973) SC 908, relied on.

3.1. In terms of Section 177 of the Code it is the place where the offence is committed. In essence it is the cause of action for initiation of the proceedings against the accused. [610-H; 611-A]

B 3.2. While in civil cases, normally the expression “cause of action” is used, in criminal cases as stated in Section 177 of the Code, reference is to the local jurisdiction where the offence is committed. These variations in etymological expression do not really make the position different. The expression “cause of action” is, therefore, not a stranger to criminal cases. [611-A-B]

C 4. The expression “cause of action” has acquired a judicially settled meaning. In the restricted sense, cause of action means the circumstances forming the infraction of the right or the immediate occasion for the action. In the wider sense, it means the necessary conditions for the maintenance of the proceeding including not only the alleged infraction, but also the infraction coupled with the right itself. Compendiously the expression means every fact, which it would be necessary for the complainant to prove, if traversed, in order to support his right or grievance to the judgment of the Court. Every fact, which is necessary to be proved, as distinguished from every piece of evidence, which is necessary to prove such a fact, comprises the “cause of action”. [611-D-F]

E 5. The expression “cause of action” is generally understood to mean a situation or state of facts that entitles a party to maintain an action in a court or a tribunal; a group of operative facts giving rise to one or more bases for sitting; a factual situation that entitles one person to obtain a remedy in court from another person. The meaning attributed to the phrase “cause of action” in common legal parlance is existence of those facts, which give a party a right to judicial interference on his behalf. [611-G-H; 612-A-B]

Black's Law Dictionary, Words and Phrases 4th Edn. and *Halsbury's Laws of England* 4th Edn., referred to.

H 6.1. In the present case, the complainant herself left the house of the husband on account of alleged dowry demands by the husband and

his relatives. There is thereafter not even a whisper of allegations about any demand of dowry or commission of any act constituting an offence. That being so, the logic of Section 178(c) of the Code relating to continuance of the offence cannot be applied. [610-F-G] A

Sujata Mukherjee (Smt.) v. Prashant Kumar Mukherjee, [1997] 5 SCC 30, relied on. B

6.2. When the aforesaid legal principles are applied to the factual scenario disclosed by the complainant in the complaint petition, the inevitable conclusion is that no part of the cause of action arose in the Court concerned and, therefore, the concerned magistrate had no jurisdiction to deal with the matter. [612-E-F] C

CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION : Criminal Appeal No. 904 of 2004.

From the Judgment and Order dated 3.9.2003 of the Madras High Court in Crl. O.P. No. 20942 of 2003. D

T.L. Viswanath Iyer and T.G. Narayanan Nair for the Appellants.

Subramonium Prasad, S. Nanda Kumar, M. Yogesh Kanna, Anuj Kumar and Rakesh K. Sharma for the Respondents. E

The Judgment of the Court was delivered by

ARIJIT PASAYAT, J. : Leave granted. F

Appellants call in question legality of the judgment rendered by a learned Single Judge of the Madras High Court whereby the appellants' prayer for quashing proceedings in CC 3532 of 2001 on the file of the Court of XVIII Metropolitan Magistrate Saidapet, Chennai, by exercise of powers under Section 482 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (in short the 'Code') was rejected. Background facts sans unnecessary details are as follows : G

Respondent no. 2 as complainant filed complaint in the Court of the concerned magistrate alleging commission of offences punishable under H

A Sections 498A and 406 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (in short the 'IPC') and Section 4 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (in short the 'Dowry Act'). The magistrate directed the police to investigate and after investigation charge-sheet was filed by the police. When the matter stood thus, the appellants filed an application under Section 482 of the Code before the High Court alleging that the concerned magistrate has no jurisdiction even to entertain the complaint even if the allegations contained therein are accepted in toto. According to them, no part of the cause of action arose within the jurisdiction of the concerned Court. The complaint itself disclosed that after 15.4.1997, the respondent left Nagercoil and came to Chennai and was staying there. All the allegations which are *per se* without any basis took place according to the complainant at Nagercoil, and therefore, the Courts at Chennai did not have the jurisdiction to deal with the matter. It was further submitted that earlier a complaint was lodged by the complainant before the concerned police officials having jurisdiction; but after inquiry no action was deemed necessary.

D In response, learned counsel submitted that some of the offences were continuing offences. The appellant no. 1 had initiated proceedings for judicial separation, the notice for which was received by her at Chennai and, therefore, the cause of action existed.

E The High Court unfortunately did not consider rival stands and even did not record any finding on the question of law raised regarding lack of jurisdiction. It felt that legal parameters were to be considered after a thorough trial after due opportunity to the parties and, therefore, the factual points raised by parties were not to be adjudicated under Section 484 of the Code.

F In support of the appeal Mr. T.L. Viswanatha Iyer, learned senior counsel, submitted that the approach of the High Court is clearly erroneous. A bare reading of the complaint would go to show that no part of the cause of action arose within the jurisdiction of the Court where the complaint was filed. Therefore, the entire proceedings had no foundation.

G In response, learned counsel for respondent no. 2-complainant submitted that the offences were continuing in terms of Section 178(c) of the Code, and therefore. The Court had the jurisdiction to deal with the

matter.

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Section 177 of the Code deals with the ordinary place of inquiry and trial, and reads as follows:

“Section 177 : *ORDINARY PLACE OF INQUIRY AND TRIAL:* B

Every offence shall ordinarily be inquired into and tried by a Court within whose local jurisdiction it was committed.”

Sections 177 to 186 deal with venue and place of trial. Section 177 C reiterates the well-established common law rule referred to in Halsbury’s Laws of England (Vol. IX para 83) that the proper and ordinary venue for the trial of a crime is the area of jurisdiction in which, on the evidence, the facts occur and which alleged to constitute the crime. There are several exceptions to this general rule and some of them are, so far as the present case is concerned, indicated in Section 178 of the Code which read as D follows:

“Section 178 *PLACE OF INQUIRY OR TRIAL*

(a) When it is uncertain in which of several local areas an offence E was committed, or

(b) where an offence is committed partly in one local area and partly in another, or

(c) where an offence is continuing one, and continues to be F committed in more local areas than one, or

(d) where it consists of several acts done in different local areas, it may be inquired into or tried by a Court having jurisdiction over G any of such local areas.”

“All crime is local, the jurisdiction over the crime belongs to the country where the crime is committed”, as observed by Blackstone. A significant word used in Section 177 of the Code is “ordinarily”. Use of the word indicates that the provision is a general one and must be read H

A subject to the special provisions contained in the Code. As observed by the Court in *Purushottamdas Dalmia v. State of West Bengal*, AIR (1961) SC 1589, *L.N. Mukherjee v. State of Madras*, AIR (1961) SC 1601, *Banwarilal Jhunjhunwalla and Ors. v. Union of India and Anr.*, AIR (1963) SC 1620 and *Mohan Baitha and Ors. v. State of Bihar and Anr.*, [2001] 4 SCC 350, exception implied by the word “ordinarily” need not be limited to those specially provided for by the law and exceptions may be provided by law on consideration or may be implied from the provisions of law permitting joint trial of offences by the same Court. No such exception is applicable to the case at hand.

C As observed by this Court in *State of Bihar v. Deokaran Nenshi and Anr.*, AIR (1973) SC 908, continuing offence is one which is susceptible of continuance and is distinguishable from the one which is committed once and for all, that it is one of those offences which arises out of the failure to obey or comply with a rule or its requirement and which involves a penalty, liability continues till compliance, that on every occasion such disobedience or non-compliance occurs or recurs, there is the offence committed.

E A similar plea relating to continuance of the offence was examined by this Court in *Sujata Mukherjee (Smt.) v. Prashant Kumar Mukherjee*, [1997] 5 SCC 30. There the allegations related to commission of alleged offences punishable under Sections 498A, 506 and 323 IPC. On the factual background, it was noted that though the dowry demands were made earlier the husband of the complainant went to the place where complainant was residing and had assaulted her. This Court held in that factual background that clause (c) of Section 178 was attracted. But in the present case the factual position is different and the complainant herself left the house of the husband on 15.4.1997 on account of alleged dowry demands by the husband and his relations. There is thereafter not even a whisper of allegations about any demand of dowry or commission of any act constituting an offence much less at Chennai. That being so, the logic of Section 178 (c) of the Code relating to continuance of the offences cannot be applied.

H The crucial question is whether any part of the cause of action arose within the jurisdiction of the concerned Court. In terms of Section 177

of the Code it is the place where the offence was committed. In essence A
it is the cause of action for initiation of the proceedings against the accused.

While in civil cases, normally the expression “cause of action” is
used, in criminal cases as stated in Section 177 of the Code, reference is B
to the local jurisdiction where the offence is committed. These variations
in etymological expression do not really make the position different. The
expression “cause of action” is therefore not a stranger to criminal cases.

It is settled law that cause of action consists of bundle of facts, which
give cause to enforce the legal inquiry for redress in a court of law. In C
other words, it is a bundle of facts, which taken with the law applicable
to them, gives the allegedly affected party a right to claim relief against
the opponent. It must include some act done by the latter since in the
absence of such an act no cause of action would possibly accrue or would
arise.

The expression “cause of action” has acquired a judicially settled
meaning. In the restricted sense cause of action means the circumstances D
forming the infraction of the right or the immediate occasion for the action.
In the wider sense, it means the necessary conditions for the maintenance
of the proceeding including not only the alleged infraction, but also the E
infraction coupled with the right itself. Compendiously the expression
means every fact, which it would be necessary for the complainant to
prove, if traversed, in order to support his right or grievance to the
judgment of the Court. Every fact, which is necessary to be proved, as
distinguished from every piece of evidence, which is necessary to prove F
such fact, comprises in “cause of action”.

The expression “cause of action” has sometimes been employed to
convey the restricted idea of facts or circumstances which constitute either
the infringement or the basis of a right and no more. In a wider and more G
comprehensive sense, it has been used to denote the whole bundle of
material facts.

The expression “cause of action” is generally understood to mean a
situation or state of facts that entitles a party to maintain an action in a court
or a tribunal; a group of operative facts giving rise to one or more bases H

- A for sitting; a factual situation that entitles one person to obtain a remedy in court from another person. (Black's Law Dictionary a "cause of action" is stated to be the entire set of facts that gives rise to an enforceable claim; the phrase comprises every fact, which, if traversed, the plaintiff must prove in order to obtain judgment. In "Words and Phrases" (4th Edn.) the meaning attributed to the phrase "cause of action" in common legal parlance is existence of those facts, which give a party a right to judicial interference on his behalf.
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In Halsbury Laws of England (Fourth Edition) it has been stated as follows:

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- D "Cause of action" has been defined as meaning simply a factual situation the existence of which entitles one person to obtain from the Court a remedy against another person. The phrase has been held from earliest time to include every fact which is material to be proved to entitle the plaintiff to succeed, and every fact which a defendant would have a right to traverse. "Cause of action" has also been taken to mean that particular act on the part of the defendant which gives the plaintiff his cause of complaint, or the subject matter of grievance founding the action, not merely the technical cause of action".
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- F When the aforesaid legal principles are applied, to the factual scenario disclosed by the complainant in the complaint petition, the inevitable conclusion is that no part of cause of action arose in Chennai and, therefore, the concerned magistrate had no jurisdiction to deal with the matter. The proceedings are quashed. The complaint be returned to respondent No. 2 who, if she so chooses, may file the same in the appropriate Court to be dealt with in accordance with law. The appeal is accordingly allowed.

V.S.S.

Appeal allowed.