

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM

PRESENT

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE K. BABU

THURSDAY, THE 19TH DAY OF OCTOBER 2023 / 27TH ASWINA, 1945

OP (DRT) NO. 392 OF 2023

AGAINST THE ORDER IN IA NO.2750/2023 IN SA 448/2023 OF DEBT

RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-2, ERNAKULAM

PETITIONERS/APPLICANTS IN S.A.:

- 1 M/S. SAMA RUBBERS, REPRESENTED BY ITS MANAGING PARTNER,
PRADEEP KUMAR.P,
AGED 59 YEARS,
PUNNAMPARAMBIL BUILDINGS,
COURT JUNCTION, PONKUNNAM.P.O, KOTTAYAM, PIN - 686506
- 2 PRADEEP KUMAR.P, AGED 59 YEARS,
MANAGING PARTNER,
M/S. SAMA RUBBERS PUNNAMPARAMBIL BUILDINGS,
COURT JUNCTION, PONKUNNAM.P.O, KOTTAYAM, PIN - 686506
- 3 SIDHARDH.P,
AGED 30 YEARS,
, PARTNER, M/S. SAMA RUBBERS,
PUNNAMPARAMBIL BUILDINGS, COURT JUNCTION,
PONKUNNAM.P.O, KOTTAYAM, PIN - 686506
- 4 N.LALITHAMMA,
AGED 82 YEARS,

3,

BY ADV R.SURENDRAN

RESPONDENTS/DEFENDANTS:

- 1 SOUTH INDIAN BANK LTD.,
REPRESENTED BY THE CHIEF MANAGER,
SOUTH INDIAN BANK LTD. KANJIRAPPALLY BRANCH,
KERALA STATE, PIN - 686507
- 2 THE AUTHORISED OFFICER & CHIEF MANAGER,
SOUTH INDIAN BANK LTD. REGIONAL OFFICE, KOTTAYAM,
FIRST FLOOR, REGENCY SQUARE, COLLECTORATE P.O,
KOTTAYAM, KERALA STATE, PIN - 686002
BY ADVS.
S.AMBILY, STANDING COUNSEL
RUPA R. NAIR (K/001021/2023)
RUBAN JOE TONIYO (K/002926/2022)
MATHEW JOSEPH BALUMMEL (K/001219/2019)
K.K.CHANDRAN PILLAI (SR.) (C-41)

THIS OP (DEBT RECOVERY TRIBUNAL) HAVING COME UP FOR ADMISSION
ON 19.10.2023, THE COURT ON THE SAME DAY DELIVERED THE FOLLOWING:

'C.R'

K.BABU, J.

O.P (DRT) No.392 of 2023

Dated this the 19th day of October, 2023

JUDGMENT

The prayers in this Original Petition filed under Article 227 of the Constitution of India are as follows:

“Therefore the honourable High Court of Kerala may be pleased to issue notice to the respondents and after hearing there may be an order

- a) Setting aside Exhibit P4 order in I.A No. No.2750 of 2023 in S.A No.448 of 2023 of Debt Recovery Tribunal-2, Ernakulam
- b) Directing the Debt Recovery Tribunal-2, Ernakulam to consider all questions such as prima facie case, irreparable injury and balance of convenience etc. of the parties and pass fresh order in I.A No. No.2750 of 2023 in S.A No.448 of 2023 of Debt Recovery Tribunal-2, Ernakulam, and
- c) Any other relief that the honourable court may deem appropriate to meet the ends of justice.”

Facts:

2. Petitioner No.1 is a partnership firm registered under the Indian Partnership Act. Petitioner No.2 is the Managing Partner of the firm. Petitioner No.3 is one of the partners. Petitioner No.4 is a guarantor of the loan availed by petitioner No.1 from respondent No.1, the bank (secured creditor).

2.1. On 15.12.2017, petitioner No.2 had availed a credit facility

from the bank to the tune of Rs.10 Crores in favour of the firm, with petitioner No.4 standing as guarantor. The immovable property in Survey No.27/2 of Koovappally Village of Kanjirappally Taluk in Kottayam District was given as security for repayment of the loan amount. The title deeds of the property were deposited with the bank for creating an equitable mortgage. On 26.02.2018, the cash-credit limit was enhanced to Rs.11 Crores. On 26.02.2020, the bank classified the loan account as Non-Performing Asset (NPA). Thereafter, the bank initiated proceedings under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI Act) by issuing notice to the petitioners to pay a total sum of Rs.11,87,68,028.39/-. On 08.09.2020, the bank issued a possession notice under Section 13(4) of the SARFAESI Act proclaiming that the movable and immovable properties involved have been taken possession by way of symbolic possession. The petitioners challenged the measures taken by the bank under Section 13(4) of the SARFAESI Act by filing S.A No.233/2020 before the Debts Recovery Tribunal-II, Ernakulam. The Tribunal granted interim stay and, after final adjudication, dismissed the Securitisation

Application as per order dated 17.01.2023.

2.2. The bank filed O.A No.702/2020 before the Debts Recovery Tribunal. On 09.02.2023, the bank issued notice under Section 13(8) of the SARFAESI Act proposing to sell the property mortgaged on the failure of the petitioners to discharge the liability. In the meantime, the bank approached the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court, Kottayam, for appointment of an Advocate Commissioner under Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act. As per order dated 14.02.2023, the Chief Judicial Magistrate appointed an Advocate Commissioner and directed him to take possession of the properties. The Advocate Commissioner issued a notice proposing to take possession of the properties. Petitioner No.2 approached this Court by filing W.P(C) No.9226/2023 to direct the respondent to consider the request for One Time Settlement. The bank rejected the proposal submitted by the petitioners for One Time Settlement. Petitioner No.2 withdrew the Writ Petition No.9226/2023 on 18.08.2023 with the liberty to challenge the proceedings under Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act before the Debts Recovery Tribunal. On 21.08.2023, the petitioners filed S.A No.448/2023 before the Debts Recovery Tribunal-II, Ernakulam, challenging the measures

taken by the bank under Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act. Along with the S.A, the petitioners filed I.A No.2750/2023 seeking a stay of the measures taken under the SARFAESI Act. The Tribunal initially granted an interim order. After hearing both sides, as per Exhibit P4 order, the Tribunal dismissed the interim application.

3. The order in I.A No.2750/2023 is under challenge in this Original Petition.

4. I have heard Sri.R.Surendran, the learned counsel for the petitioners and Sri.K.K.Chandran Pillai, the learned Senior Counsel appearing for the bank.

5. The learned counsel for the petitioners made the following submissions:

- (i) The only remedy available to the petitioners is to file this original petition under Article 227 of the Constitution of India, as the interim order under challenge is not appealable under Section 18 of the SARFAESI Act.
- (ii) The order impugned has occasioned in failure of justice as the Tribunal has not considered the fundamental principles of ad-interim relief, namely

- (i) strong *prima facie* case, (ii) balance of convenience and (iii) irreparable injury.
- (iii) The Tribunal failed to appreciate that the Chief Judicial Magistrate had not satisfied with the requirements provided in Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act while passing Ext.P1 order.
- (iv) The mechanical way of passing Ext.P1 order by the Chief Judicial Magistrate has interfered with the Constitutional rights of the petitioners under Article 300A.

6. The learned Senior Counsel appearing for the bank submitted the following:

The petitioners have an equally efficacious remedy, as provided in Section 18 of the SARFAESI Act, to challenge the impugned order. All orders of the Tribunal, including the interim order challenged in the present proceedings, are appealable under Section 18 of the SARFAESI Act. Exhibit P1 order passed by the Chief Judicial Magistrate is in the nature of an administrative order, wherein the learned Magistrate had himself satisfied the requirements of Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act.

7. The first contention of the learned counsel for the petitioners is that the interim order like the one impugned in this proceeding is not appealable under Section 18 of the SARFAESI Act. The learned counsel submitted that Section 18 of the SARFAESI Act contemplates only final orders, as only orders under Section 17 of the SARFAESI Act are appealable. The learned counsel submitted that the impugned order arose from an application filed under Section 19 (25) of the Recovery of Debts and Bankruptcy Act, 1993.

8. The learned Senior Counsel resisted the contention and submitted that any order made by the Debts Recovery Tribunal under Section 17 of the SARFAESI Act is appealable. The learned Senior Counsel relied on **Varghese A.P. v. Chief Manager (Authorized Officer) Vijaya Bank and Others [2019 (4) KLJ 956] = [2019 (5) KHC 685]** to substantiate his contention.

9. It is useful to extract Sections 17 and 18 of the SARFAESI Act:

"17. Application against measures to recover secured debts.-(1) Any person (including borrower), aggrieved by any of the measures referred to in sub-section (4) of section 13 taken by the secured creditor or his authorised officer under this Chapter, may make an application along with such fee, as may be prescribed, to the Debts Recovery Tribunal having jurisdiction in the matter within forty-five days from the date on which such measures had been taken:

xxx xxx xxx

xxx xxx xxx

(2) The Debts Recovery Tribunal shall consider whether any of the measures referred to in sub-section (4) of section 13 taken by the secured creditor for enforcement of security are in accordance with the provisions of this Act and the rules made thereunder.

(3) If, the Debts Recovery Tribunal, after examining the facts and circumstances of the case and evidence produced by the parties, comes to the conclusion that any of the measures referred to in sub-section (4) of section 13, taken by the secured creditor are not in accordance with the provisions of this Act and the rules made thereunder, and require restoration of the management or restoration of possession, of the secured assets to the borrower or other aggrieved person, it may, by order,—

(a) declare the recourse to any one or more measures referred to in sub-section (4) of section 13 taken by the secured creditor as invalid; and

(b) restore the possession of secured assets or management of secured assets to the borrower or such other aggrieved person, who has made an application under sub-section (1), as the case may be; and

(c) pass such other direction as it may consider appropriate and necessary in relation to any of the recourse taken by the secured creditor under sub-section (4) of section 13.

(4) If, the Debts Recovery Tribunal declares the recourse taken by a secured creditor under sub-section (4) of section 13, is in accordance with the provisions of this Act and the rules made thereunder, then, notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, the secured creditor shall be entitled to take recourse to one or more of the measures specified under sub-section (4) of section 13 to recover his secured debt.

(4A) Where—

(i) any person, in an application under sub-section (1), claims any tenancy or leasehold rights upon the secured asset, the Debt Recovery Tribunal, after examining the facts of the case and evidence produced by the parties in relation to such claims shall, for the purposes of enforcement of security interest, have the jurisdiction to examine whether lease or tenancy,—

(a) has expired or stood determined; or

(b) is contrary to section 65A of the Transfer of Property Act, 1882 (4 of 1882); or

(c) is contrary to terms of mortgage; or

(d) is created after the issuance of notice of default and demand by the Bank under sub-section (2) of section 13 of the Act; and

(ii) the Debt Recovery Tribunal is satisfied that tenancy right or leasehold rights claimed in secured asset falls under the sub-clause (a) or sub-clause (b) or sub-clause (c) or sub-clause (d) of clause (i), then notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any other law for the time being in force, the Debt Recovery Tribunal may pass such order as it deems fit in accordance with the provisions of this Act.

(5) xxx xxx xxx

(6) xxx xxx xxx

(7) xxx xxx xxx

18. Appeal to Appellate Tribunal.—(1) Any person aggrieved, by any order made by the Debts Recovery Tribunal under section 17, may prefer an appeal along with such fee, as may be prescribed to an Appellate Tribunal within thirty days from the date of receipt of the order of Debts Recovery Tribunal.

Provided that different fees may be prescribed for filing an appeal by the borrower or by the person other than the borrower:

Provided further that no appeal shall be entertained unless the borrower has deposited with the Appellate Tribunal fifty per cent. of the amount of debt due from him, as claimed by the secured creditors or determined by the Debts Recovery Tribunal, whichever is less:

Provided also that the Appellate Tribunal may, for the reasons to be recorded in writing, reduce the amount to not less than twenty-five per cent. of debt referred to in the second proviso.

(2) Save as otherwise provided in this Act, the Appellate Tribunal shall, as far as may be, dispose of the appeal in accordance with the provisions of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 (51 of 1993) and rules made thereunder.”

10. As per Section 17 of the SARFAESI Act, any person aggrieved by any of the measures referred to in sub-section (4) of Section 13 of the SARFAESI Act taken by the secured creditor or his authorised officer may challenge the same before the Tribunal. Undisputedly, the measures under sub-section (4) of Section 13 of the SARFAESI Act are under challenge before the Tribunal. As per Section 18 of the SARFAESI Act, any order made by the Tribunal in a proceeding under Section 17 of the SARFAESI Act is appealable before the Appellate Tribunal.

11. The learned counsel for the petitioners, focussing on the Second Proviso to Section 18 (1) of the SARFAESI Act, submitted that the words 'the amount.....determined by the Debts Recovery Tribunal' in the proviso regarding the pre-deposit before the Appellate Tribunal indicate that only the final orders are appealable under Section 18 of the SARFAESI Act. The Second Proviso, as mentioned above, refers to 'the amount of debt as claimed by the secured creditors or determined by the Debts Recovery Tribunal whichever is less'. Therefore, the contention of the petitioners with the aid of the Second Proviso has no foundation.

12. A Division Bench of this Court in **Varghese A.P (supra)** held that an order passed in an interim application also falls within the ambit of Section 18 of the SARFAESI Act. Resultantly, an order passed in an interim application is also appealable under Section 18 of the SARFAESI Act.

13. Now, coming to the merits of the Original Petition. It is settled law that the power under Article 227 of the Constitution may be exercised when there is grave injustice or failure of justice and when (i) the Court or the Tribunal has assumed a jurisdiction which it does not have (ii) has failed to exercise a jurisdiction which it does have, such failure occasioning a failure of justice and (iii) the jurisdiction though available is being exercised in a manner which tantamounts to overstepping the limits of jurisdiction {See **Raveendran Pilla P. & Ors. v. State of Kerala & Ors.**, [(2020 (6) KLT 838] = [2021 (1) KHC 38] & **Deepak v. Govardhanan Nair**, [2021 (6) KLT 708] = [2021 (6) KHC 565 (DB)]}.

14. The High Court exercising supervisory jurisdiction does not act as a court of first appeal to re-appreciate, reweigh the evidence or facts upon which the determination under challenge is based. Supervisory jurisdiction is not to correct every error of fact

or even a legal flaw when the final finding is justified or can be supported. The High Court is not to substitute its own decision on facts and conclusion, for that of the inferior Court or Tribunal. The jurisdiction exercised is in the nature of correctional jurisdiction to set right grave dereliction of duty or flagrant abuse, violation of fundamental principles of law or justice. The power under Article 227 is exercised sparingly in appropriate cases, like when there is no evidence at all to justify, or the finding is so perverse that no reasonable person can possibly come to such a conclusion that the Court or Tribunal has come to. It is axiomatic that such discretionary relief must be exercised to ensure that there is no miscarriage of justice. {Vide: **Celina Coelho Pereira v. Ulhas Mahabaleshwar Kholkar [(2010) 1 SCC 217]**}.

15. The exercise of power under Article 227 involves a duty on the High Court to keep inferior Courts and Tribunals within the bounds of their authority and to see that they do the duty expected or required of them in a legal manner. The High Court is not vested with any unlimited prerogative to correct all kinds of hardship or wrong decisions made within the limits of the jurisdiction of the subordinate Courts or Tribunals. Exercise of this power and

Debts Recovery Tribunal on the following grounds:

- (a) The bank has not complied with the mandatory requirements in accordance with the provisions of the SARFAESI Act.
- (b) The authorised officer of the Bank has not declared the aggregate amount of financial assistance granted to the petitioners and the total claim of the bank as on the date of filing of the application in the affidavit filed before the Chief Judicial Magistrate and therefore, the affidavit under Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act is in violation of the proviso to Section 14 (1) of the SARFAESI Act.
- (c) The deponent has not declared in the affidavit before the Chief Judicial Magistrate that the bank is holding a valid and subsisting security interest over the properties of the petitioners which is in violation of sub-clause (ii) of the first proviso.
- (d) The deponent has not declared that the borrower has created security interest on various properties in the affidavit, which is non-compliance of sub-clause (iii)

of the first proviso to Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act.

The authorised officer/the deponent has not declared that he is entitled to take possession of the secured assets which is in violation of sub-clause (viii) of the first proviso.

- (e) The date on which the affidavit was attested had not been mentioned in the affidavit.
- (f) The Chief Judicial Magistrate has not satisfied with the contents of the affidavit as required by the statutory provisions.

19. The relevant portion of the impugned order reads thus:

“4. On careful consideration of the submissions of both sides and the materials available on record, it appears that this is the second round litigation initiated by the applicants against the securitization measure. Before considering the merit of the contentions, it is not out of place to mention that more than Rs.17.00 Crores is outstanding in the loan accounts availed by the applicants as on 23.08.2023. Previously, SA was filed against the securitization measures which continued about three years and the same was dismissed on contest. Admittedly, the said judgment is not challenged in any other forum which attained finality. Instead of repaying the public money the applicants have filed this SA again raising some technical ground in the measure under Section 14 of the SARFAESI ACT. It appears from this conduct of the applicants that they are only interested to delay the recovery measure for realization of the huge outstanding.

5. The learned counsel for the applicants contended that in the affidavit filed before the Ld. Chief Judicial Magistrate, the Advocate has not put the date while swearing the affidavit and also the said affidavit is not as per the statutory requirement

prescribed in the proviso to Section 14 of the SARFAESI ACT. It is seen from the record that the Ld. Chief Judicial Magistrate being satisfied with the contents of the affidavit passed order in taking of possession of the secured assets. Section 14 of the SARFAESI ACT prescribes that application shall be supported by affidavit of Authorized Officer which is mandatory. The format prescribed for the affidavit is not mandatory. The same can be modified and varied or altered as per the requirement. Even if there is any defect in the affidavit, unless it caused any prejudice to the applicant, they cannot raise contention against it.

6. In the judgment of the Hon'ble Apex Court reported in 2020 KHC 6610 in the case of L & T Housing Finance Ltd. v. M/s.Trishul Developers & another, it was held that "when the action has been taken by the competent authority as per the procedure prescribed by law and the person affected has a knowledge leaving no ambiguity or confusion in initiating proceedings under the provisions of the SARFAESI Act by the secured creditor, in our considered view, such action taken thereof cannot be held to be bad in law merely on raising a trivial objection which has no legs to stand unless the person is able to show any substantial prejudice being caused on account of the procedural lapse as prescribed under the Act or the rules framed there under....." The mistake pointed out by the learned counsel for the applicants that the Advocate has not put the date etc. cannot be considered as material defects to discard the same nor it caused any substantial prejudice to the applicants. Huge amount is outstanding in the loan account. In the absence of any substantial prejudice, the applicants are not entitled any indulgence. They have also failed to establish any prima facie case to intervene with the securitization measures."

20. The learned counsel heavily contended that the affidavit filed by the authorised officer of the bank is not an affidavit in the eye of law, and the learned Chief Judicial Magistrate should not have acted upon the same. The learned counsel relied on **Umesh Kumar v. State of A.P. [(2013) 10 SCC 591]** in support of his contentions. The learned counsel, relying on Rule 40 (2) of the

Criminal Rules of Practice, which states that a person before whom the affidavit is sworn or affirmed shall state the date on which and the place where the same is made, submitted that as the affidavit is in utter disregard of the provisions of the Criminal Rules of Practice, it cannot be acted upon. The learned counsel brought to my notice that the affidavit filed by the authorised officer does not contain the date on which the same was attested by the lawyer concerned. The affidavit appears to contain the date on which the deponent affirmed the same, but the lawyer before whom the deponent affirmed and signed the same had not mentioned the date of attestation. In **Umesh Kumar** (supra) the Apex Court was considering the validity of an undated affidavit. But, in the present case, the affidavit sworn to by the authorised officer cannot be treated as undated, though the lawyer before whom he affirmed the same had omitted to mention the date. Therefore, the reliance placed by the petitioners with the aid of **Umesh Kumar** (supra) is of no assistance.

21. The learned counsel for the petitioners further relied on the violations of various provisions of Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act referring to the non-mention of specific details as mentioned in

the grounds referred to in paragraph 18 above. Relying on those omissions, the learned counsel for the petitioners submitted that the learned Chief Judicial Magistrate thoroughly failed to record his satisfaction, leading to a mechanical order without any reason. The learned counsel submitted that as per the second proviso to Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act, on receipt of the affidavit from the authorised officer, the Magistrate concerned, after satisfying the contents of the affidavit, shall pass suitable orders to take possession of the secured assets. The counsel added that the satisfaction contemplated in the second proviso is to be judicially exercised.

22. The learned Senior Counsel appearing for the bank submitted that the exercise of power under Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act by the Chief Judicial Magistrate, where the rights of the parties are not determined, is only administrative in nature.

23. The inquiry conducted by the Chief Judicial Magistrate under Section 14 of the SARFAESI Act does not result in an adjudication of the parties' *inter se* rights regarding the subject matter. It is an administrative or executive function regarding the verification of the affidavit and documents relied on by the parties.

The authority must display a judicial approach in considering the relevant facts asserted by the parties. It is a quasi- judicial inquiry through a non-judicial process {Vide: **Muhammed Ashraf v. Union of India [2008 (4) KLT 1]**, **Canara Bank v. Stephen John and Others [2018 (3) KHC 670] = [2018 (3) KLJ 712]** and **Indian Bank v. D.Visalakshi [2019 (20) SCC 47]**}.

24. On a perusal of the materials, it is difficult to conclude that the Tribunal has not taken into account the question whether the Chief Judicial Magistrate had displayed a judicial approach in verifying the affidavit and the documents produced along with it.

25. The learned counsel for the petitioners relying on **Jimmy Thomas v. Indian Bank [2023 (3) KLT 630]** submitted that the Tribunal ought to have appreciated the merits of the contentions taken by both sides on the application of the principles governing the grant of interim relief, namely, strong *prima facie* case, balance of convenience and irreparable injury. The impugned order indicates that it was alive to the contentions raised in the Securitisation Application.

26. The materials placed before this Court do not demonstrate that the Tribunal has failed to exercise its jurisdiction

in a manner negating justice. It is difficult to hold that the approach adopted by the Tribunal has occasioned a failure of justice. The impugned order requires no interference by this Court exercising jurisdiction under Article 227 of the Constitution of India. The petitioners are at liberty to invoke their statutory remedy. If they approach the appropriate statutory forum challenging the impugned order, the said forum shall decide the matter untrammelled by any of the observations made by this Court in this proceeding.

The Original Petition, therefore, stands dismissed.

**K.BABU,
JUDGE**

APPENDIX OF OP (DRT) 392/2023

PETITIONER EXHIBITS

- Exhibit P1 TRUE COPY OF THE S.A NO.448 OF 2023 BEFORE THE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-2, ERNAKULAM
- Exhibit P2 TRUE COPY OF THE I.A NO. NO.2750 OF 2023 IN S.A NO.448 OF 2023 BEFORE THE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-2, ERNAKULAM
- Exhibit P3 TRUE COPY OF THE COUNTER AFFIDAVIT DATED 24-8-2023 FILED BY THE RESPONDENTS IN I.A NO. NO.2750 OF 2023 IN S.A NO.448 OF 2023 BEFORE THE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-2, ERNAKULAM
- Exhibit P4 TRUE COPY OF THE ORDER IN I.A NO. NO.2750 OF 2023 IN S.A NO.448 OF 2023 AS UPLOADED IN THE WEBSITE OF THE DEBT RECOVERY TRIBUNAL
- Exhibit P4 A TRUE COPY OF THE ORDER DATED 20-9-2023 IN I.A NO. NO.2750 OF 2023 IN S.A NO.448 OF 2023 OF DEBT RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-2, ERNAKULAM.