

Lucknow Development Authority Vs. M.K. Gupta

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Court : Supreme Court of India

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Reported in : AIR1994SC787; 1994(1)BLJR249; [1994]80CompCas714(SC); (1994)1CompLJ1(SC); JT1993(6)SC307; (1994)1MLJ55(SC); 1994(0)MPLJ461; 1994(I)OLR(SC)258; 1993(4)SCALE370; (1994)1SCC24; 1994(1) SCC 243

Judge : Kuldip Singh and; R.M. Sahai, JJ.

Acts : [Sale of Goods Act, 1930](#); Lucknow Development Act; Delhi Development Act; Bangalore Development Act; [Consumer Protection Act, 1986](#) - Sections - 1, 2, 11, 16, 17 and 21; [Companies Act, 1956](#); [Consumer Protection Act, 1986](#) - Sections - 1, 2, 11, 16, 17 and 21; [Companies Act, 1956](#)

Appeal No. : Civil Appeal No. 6237 of 1990

Appellant : Lucknow Development Authority

Respondent : M.K. Gupta

Advocate for Pet/Ap. : Saharya and; Co.,; Surya Kant,;

Prior history : From the Judgment and Order dated 13.7.1990 of the national Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, New Delhi in First Appeal No. 24 of 1990

Judgement :

ORDER

1. The question of law that arises for consideration in these appeals, directed against orders passed by the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (referred hereinafter as National Commission), New Delhi is if the statutory authorities such as Lucknow Development Authority or Delhi Development Authority or Bangalore Development Authority constituted under State Acts to carry on planned development of the cities in the State are amenable to Consumer Protection Act 1986 (hereinafter referred to as 'the Act') for any act or omission relating to housing activity such as delay in delivery of possession of the houses to the allottees, non-completion of the flat within the stipulated time, or defective and faulty construction etc. Another aspect of this issue is if the housing activity carried on by the statutory authority or private builder or contractor came within the purview of the Act only after its amendment by the Ordinance No. 24 in 1993 or the Commission could entertain a complaint for such violations even before.

2. How the dispute arose in different appeals is not of any consequence except for two appeals which shall be adverted later, for determining right and power of the Commission to award exemplary damages and accountability of the statutory authorities. We therefore come straightaway to the legal issue involved in these appeals. But before doing so and examining the question of jurisdiction of the District Forum or State or National Commission to entertain a complaint under the Act, it appears appropriate to ascertain the purpose of the Act, the objective it seeks to achieve and the nature of social purpose it seeks to promote as it shall facilitate in comprehending the issue involved and assist in construing various provisions of the Act effectively. To begin with the preamble of the Act, which can afford useful assistance to ascertain the legislative intention, it was enacted, 'to provide for the protection of the interest of consumers'. Use of the word 'protection' furnishes key to the minds of makers of the Act. Various definitions and provisions which elaborately attempt to achieve this objective have to be construed in this light without departing from the settled view that a preamble cannot control otherwise plain meaning of a provision. In fact the law meets long felt necessity of protecting the common man from such wrongs for which the remedy under ordinary law for various reasons has become illusory. Various legislations and

regulations permitting the State to intervene and protect interest of the consumers have become a haven for unscrupulous ones and the enforcement machinery either does not move or it moves ineffectively, inefficiently and for reasons which are not necessary to be stated. The importance of the Act lies in promoting welfare of the society by enabling the consumer to participate directly in the market economy. It attempts to remove the helplessness of a consumer which he faces against powerful business, described as, 'a network of rackets' or a society in which, 'producers have secured power' to 'rob the rest' and the might of public bodies which are degenerating into store house of inaction where papers do not move from one desk to another as a matter of duty and responsibility but for extraneous consideration leaving the common man helpless, bewildered and shocked. The malady is becoming so rampant, widespread and deep that the society instead of bothering, complaining and fighting for it, is accepting it as part of life. The enactment in these unbelievable yet harsh realities appears to be a silver lining, which may in course of time succeed in checking the rotine. A scrutiny of various definitions such as 'consumer', 'service', 'trader', 'unfair' trade practice indicates that legislature has attempted to widen the reach of the Act. Each of these definitions are in two parts, one, explanatory and the other expandatory. The explanatory or the main part itself uses expressions of wide amplitude indicating clearly its wide sweep then its ambit is widened to such things which otherwise would have been beyond its natural import. Manner of construing an inclusive clause and its widening effect has been explained in *Dilworth v. Commissioner of Stamps* [1899] A.C. 99 as under:

'include' is very generally used interpretation clauses in order to enlarge the meaning of the words or phrases occurring in the body of the statute, and when it is so used these words or phrases must be construed as comprehending, not only such things as they signify according to their natural, import, but also those things which the definition clause declares that they shall include.

It has been approved by this Court in *Regional Director, Employees' State Insurance Corporation v. Highland Coffee Works of P.F.X. Saldanha and Sons and Anr.* : (1991)3SCC617 , *Andhra Pradesh v. Taj Mahal Hotel, Secunderabad* : [1971]82ITR44(SC) and *The State of Bombay and Ors. v. The Hospital Mazdoor*

Sabha and Ors. : (1960)ILLJ251SC . The provisions of the Act thus have to be construed in favour of the consumer to achieve the purpose of enactment as it is a social benefit oriented legislation. The primary duty of the court while construing the provisions of such an Act is to adopt a constructive approach subject to that it should not do violence to the language of the provisions and is not contrary to attempted objective of the enactment.

3. Although the legislation is a milestone in history of socio- economic legislation and is directed towards achieving public benefit we shall first examine if on a plain reading of the provisions unaided by any external aid of interpretation it applies to building or construction activity carried on by the statutory authority or private builder or contractor and extends even to such bodies whose ancillary function is to allot a plot or construct a flat. In other words could the authorities constituted under the Act entertain a complaint by a consumer for any defect or deficiency in relation to construction activity against a private builder or statutory authority. That shall depend on ascertaining the jurisdiction of the Commission. How extensive it is? A National or a State Commission under Sections 21 and 16 and a consumer forum under Section 11 of the Act is entitled to entertain a complaint depending on valuation of goods or services and compensation claimed. The nature of, 'complaint' which can be filed, according to Clause (c) of Section 2 of the Act is for unfair trade practice or restrictive trade practice adopted by any trader or for the defects suffered for the goods bought or agreed to be bought and for deficiency in the service hired or availed of or agreed to be hired or availed of, by a 'complainant' who under Clause (b) of the definition clause means a consumer or any voluntary consumer association registered under the Companies Act 1956 or under any law for the time being in force or the Central Government or any State Government or where there are one or more consumers having the same interest then a complaint by such consumers. The right thus to approach the Commission or the forum vests in consumer for unfair trade practice or defect in supply of goods or deficiency in service. The word 'consumer' is a comprehensive expression. It extends from a person who. buys any commodity to consume either as eatable or otherwise from a shop, business house, corporation, store, fair price shop to use of private or public services. In Oxford Dictionary a consumer is defined as a, 'purchaser of goods or services'. In Black's Law Dictionary it is

explained to mean, 'one who consumes. Individuals who purchase, use, maintain, and dispose of products and services. A member of that broad class of people who are affected by pricing policies, financing practices, quality of goods and services, credit reporting, debt collection, and other trade practices for which state and federal consumer protection laws are enacted.' The Act opts for no less wider definition. It reads as under:

'Consumer' means any person who,

(i) buys any goods for a consideration which has been paid or promised or partly paid and partly promised, or under any system of deferred payment and includes any user of such goods other than the person who (buys such goods for consideration paid or promised or partly paid or partly promised or under any system of deferred payment when such use is made with the approval of such person but does not include a person who obtains such goods for resale or for any commercial purpose; or

(ii) hires or avails of any services for a consideration which has been paid or promised or partly paid and partly promised, or under any system of deferred payment and includes any beneficiary of such services other than the person who hires or avails of the service for consideration paid or promised, or partly paid and partly promised, or under any system of deferred payment, when such services are availed of with the approval of the first mentioned person:

(Explanation - For the purposes of Sub-clause (i) 'commercial purpose' does not include use by a consumer of goods bought and used by him exclusively for the purpose of earning his livelihood, by means of self-employment;)

It is in two parts. The first deals with goods and the other with services. Both parts first declare the meaning of goods and services by use of wide expressions. Their ambit is further enlarged by use of inclusive clause. For instance, it is not only purchaser of goods or hirer of services but even those who use the goods or who are beneficiaries of services with approval of the person who purchased the goods or who hired services are included in it. The legislature has taken precaution not only to define 'complaint', 'complainant', 'consumer' but even to mention in detail

what would amount to unfair trade practice by giving an elaborate definition in Clause (r) and even to define 'defect' and 'deficiency' by Clauses (f) and (g) for which a consumer can approach the Commission. The Act thus aims to protect the economic interest of a consumer as understood in commercial sense as a purchaser of goods and in the larger sense of user of services. The common characteristics of goods and services are that they are supplied at a price to cover the costs and generate profit or income for the seller of goods or provider of services. But the defect in one and deficiency in other may have to be removed and compensated differently. The former is, normally, capable of being replaced and repaired whereas the other may be required to be compensated by award of the just equivalent of the value or damages for loss. 'Goods' have been defined by Clause (i) and have been assigned the same meaning as in [Sale of Goods Act, 1930](#) which reads as under:

'goods' means every kind of movable property other than actionable claims and money; and includes stock and shares, growing crops, grass, and things attached to or forming part of the land which are agreed to be served before sale or under the contract of sale.

It was therefore urged that the applicability of the Act having been confined to moveable goods 'only a complaint filed for any defect in relation to immoveable goods such as a house or building or allotment of site could not have been entertained by the Commission. The submission does not appear to be well founded. The respondents were aggrieved either by delay in delivery of possession of house or use of sub-standard material etc. and therefore they claimed deficiency in service rendered by the appellants. Whether they were justified in their complaint and if such act or omission could be held to be denial of service in the Act shall be examined presently but the jurisdiction of the Commission could not be ousted because even though it was service it related to immoveable property.

4. What is the meaning of the word 'service'? Does it extend to deficiency in the building of a house or flat? Can a complaint be filed under the Act against the statutory authority or a builder or contractor for any deficiency in respect of given

property. The answer to all this shall understanding of the word 'service'. The term has variety of meanings. It may mean any benefit or any act resulting in promoting interest or happiness. It may be contractual, professional, public, domestic, legal, statutory etc. The concept of service thus is very wide. How it should be understood and what it means depends in the context in which it has been used in an enactment. Clause (o) of the definition section defines it as under :

'Service' means service of any description which is made available to potential users and includes the provision of facilities in connection with banking, financing, insurance, transport, processing, supply of electrical or other energy, board or loading or both (housing construction) entertainment, amusement or the purveying of news or other information, but does not include the rendering of any service free of charge or under contract of personal service.

It is in three parts. The main part is followed by inclusive clause and ends by exclusionary clause. The main clause itself is very wide. It applies to any service made available to potential users. The words 'any' and 'potential' are significant. Both are of wide amplitude. The word 'any' dictionary means 'one or some or all'. In Black's Law Dictionary it is explained thus, word 'any' has a diversity of meaning and may be employed to indicate 'all' or 'every' as well as 'same' or 'one' and its meaning in a given statute depends upon the context and subject matter of the statute'. The use of the word 'any' in the context it has been used in Clause (o) indicates that it has been used in wider sense extending from one to all. The other word 'potential' is again very wide. In Oxford Dictionary it is defined as 'capable' of coming into being, possibility'. In Black's Law Dictionary it is defined as 'extending in possibility but not in act. Naturally and probably expected to come into existence at some future time, though not now existing; for example, the future product of grain or trees already planted, or the successive future instalments or payments on a contract or engagement, already made.' In other words service which is not only extended to actual users but those who are capable of using it are covered in the definition. The clause is thus very wide and extends to any or all actual or potential users. But the legislature did not stop there. It expended the meaning of the word further in modem sense by extending it to even such facilities as are available to a consumer in connection with banking, financing etc. Each of these

are wide ranging activities in day to day life. They are discharged both by statutory and private bodies. In absence of any indication, express or implied there is no reason to hold that authorities created by the statute are beyond purview of the Act. When banks advance loan or accept deposit or provide facility of locker they undoubtedly render service. A State Bank or nationalised bank renders as much service as private bank. No distinction can be drawn in private and public transport or insurance companies. Even the supply of electricity or gas which throughout the country is being made, mainly, by statutory authorities is included in it. The legislative intention is thus clear to protect a consumer against services rendered even by statutory bodies. The test, therefore, is not if a person against who complaint is made is a statutory body but whether the nature of the duty and function performed by it is service or even facility.

5. This takes us to the larger issue if the public authorities under different enactments are amenable to jurisdiction under the Act. It was vehemently argued that the local authorities or government bodies develop land and construct houses in discharge of their statutory function, therefore, they could not be subjected to provisions of the Act. The learned Counsel urged that if the ambit of the Act would be widened to include even such authorities it would vitally affect functioning of official bodies. The learned Counsel submitted that the entire objective of the Act is to protect a consumer against malpractices in business. The argument proceeded on complete misapprehension of the purpose of Act and even its explicit language. In fact the Act requires provider of service to be more objective and caretaking. It is still more in public services. When private undertakings are taken over by the government or corporations are created to discharge what is otherwise State's function, one of the inherent objectives of such social welfare measures is to provide better, efficient and the cheaper services to the people. Any attempt, therefore, to exclude services offered by statutory or official bodies to the common man would be against the provisions of the Act and spirit behind it. It is indeed unfortunate that since enforcement of the Act there is a demand and even political pressure is built up to exclude one or the other class from operation of the Act. How ironical it is that official or semi-official bodies which insist on numerous benefits, which are otherwise available in private sector, succeed in bargaining for it on threat of strike mainly because of larger income accruing due

to rise in number of consumers and not due to better and efficient functioning claim exclusion when it comes to accountability from operation of the Act. The spirit of consumerism is so feeble and dormant that no association, public or private spirited, raises any finger on regular hike in prices not because it is necessary but either because it has not been done for sometime or because the operational cost has gone up irrespective of the efficiency without any regard to its impact on the common man. In our opinion, the entire argument found on being statutory does not appear to have any substance. A government or semi-government body or a local authority is as much amenable to the Act as any other private body rendering similar service. Truly speaking it would be a service to the society if such bodies instead of claiming exclusion subject themselves to the Act and let their acts and omissions scrutinised as public accountability is necessary for healthy growth of society.

6. What remains to be examined is if housing construction or building activity carried on by a private or statutory body was service within meaning of Clause (o) of Section 2 of the Act as it stood prior to inclusion of the expression 'housing construction' in the definition of 'service' by Ordinance No. 24 of 1993. As pointed out earlier the entire purpose of widening the definition is to include in it not only day to day buying and selling activity undertaken by a common man but even to such activities which are otherwise not commercial in nature yet they partake of a character in which some benefit is conferred on the consumer. Construction of a house or flat is for the benefit of person for whom it is constructed. He may do it himself or hire services of a builder or contractor. The latter being for consideration is service as defined in the Act. Similarly when a statutory authority develops land or allots a site or constructs a house for the benefit of common man it is as much service as by a builder or contractor. The one is contractual service and other statutory service. If the service is defective or it is not what was represented then it would be unfair trade practice as defined' in the Act. Any defect in construction activity would be denial of comfort and service to a consumer. When possession of property is not delivered within stipulated period the delay so caused is denial of service. Such disputes or claims are not in respect of immoveable property as argued but deficiency in rendering of service of particular standard, quality or grade. Such deficiencies or omissions are defined in Sub-clause (ii) of Clause (r)

of Section 2 as unfair trade practice. If a builder of a house uses sub-standard material in construction of a building or makes false or misleading representation about the condition of the house then it is denial of the facility or benefit of which a consumer is entitled to claim value under the Act. When the contractor or builder undertakes to erect a house or flat then it is inherent in it that he shall perform his obligation as agreed to. A flat with a leaking roof, or cracking wall or sub-standard floor is denial of service. Similarly when a statutory authority undertakes to develop land and frame housing scheme, it, while performing statutory duty renders service to the society in general and individual in particular. The entire approach of the learned Counsel for the development authority in emphasising that power exercised under a Statute could not be stretched to mean service proceeded on misconception. It is incorrect understanding of the statutory functions under a social legislation. A development authority while developing the land or framing a scheme for housing discharges statutory duty the purpose and objective of which is service to the citizens. As pointed out earlier the entire purpose of widening the definitions is to include in it not only day to day buying of goods by a common man but even to such activities which are otherwise not commercial but professional or service oriented in nature. The provisions in the Acts, namely, Lucknow Development Act. Delhi Development Act or Bangalore Development Act clearly provide for preparing plan, development of land, and framing of scheme etc. Therefore if such authority undertakes to construct building or allot houses or building sites to citizens of the State either as amenity or as benefit then it amounts to rendering of service and will be covered in the expression 'service made available to potential users'. A person who applies for allotment of a building site or for a flat constructed by the development authority or enters into an agreement with a builder or a contractor is a potential user and nature of transaction is covered in the expression 'service of any description'. It further indicates that the definition is not exhaustive. The inclusive clause succeeded in widening its scope but not exhausting the services which could be covered in earlier part. So any service except when it is free of charge or under a constraint of personal service is included in it. Since housing activity is a service it was covered in the clause as it stood before 1993.

7. In Appeal. No 2954 filed by a builder it was urged that inclusion of 'housing construction' in Clause (o) and 'avail' in Clause (d) in 1993 would indicate that the Act as it stood prior to the amendment did not apply to hiring of services in respect of housing construction. learned Counsel submitted that in absence of any expression making the amendment retrospective it should be held to be prospective as it is settled that any law including amendments which materially affect the vested rights or duties or obligations in respect of past transactions should remain untouched. Reliance was placed on Jose Da Costa and Am, v. Bascora Sadasiva Sinai Narcornim and Ors. : AIR 1975 SC1843 ; State of Madhya Pradesh and Ors. v. Rameshwar Rathod : 1990 CriLJ1756 and Re Pulborough School Board Election Case (1891) 94 All ER 834 It was also argued that when definition of 'service' in Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act was amended in 1991 it was made retrospective. Therefore, in absence of use of similar expression in this Act it should be deemed to be prospective. True, the ordinance does not make the definition retrospective in operation. But it was not necessary. In fact it appears to have been added by way of abundant caution as housing construction being service was included even earlier. Apart from that what was the vested right of the contractor under the agreement to construct the defective house or to render deficient service? A legislation which is enacted to protect public interest from undesirable activities cannot be construed in such narrow manner as to frustrate its objective. Nor is there any merit in the submission that in absence of the word 'avail' in the definition of 'consumer' such activity could not be included in service. A perusal of the definition of 'service' as it stood prior to 1993 would indicate that the word 'facility' was already there. Therefore the legislature while amending the law in 1993 added the word in Clause (d) to dispel any doubt that consumer in the Act would mean a person who not only hires but avails of any facility for consideration. It in fact indicates that these words were added more to clarify than to add something new.

8. Having examined wide reach of the Act and jurisdiction of the Commission to entertain complaint not only against business or trading activity but even to service rendered by statutory and public authorities the stage is now set for determining if the Commission in exercise of its jurisdiction under the Act could award compensation and if such compensation could be for harassment and agony to a

consumer. Both these aspects specially the latter are of vital significance in the present day context. Still more important issue is the liability of payment. That is should the society or the tax payer be burdened for oppressive and capricious act of the public officers or it be paid by those responsible for it. The administrative law of accountability of public authorities for their arbitrary and even ultra vires actions has taken many strides. It is now accepted both by this Court and English courts that the State is liable to compensate for loss or injury suffered by a citizen due to arbitrary actions of its employees. In *State of Gujarat v. Memon Mahomed Haji Hasam*, : AIR (1961) SC 1885 the order of the High Court directing payment of compensation for disposal of seized vehicles without waiting for the outcome of decision in appeal was upheld both on principle of bailee's, 'legal obligation to preserve the property intact and also the obligation to take reasonable care of it to return it in same condition in which it was seized' and also because the government was, 'bound to return the said property by reason of its statutory obligation or to pay its value if it had disabled itself from returning it either by its own act or by act of its agents and servants'. It was extended further even to bonafide action of the authorities if it was contrary to law in *Lala Bishambar Nath v. The Agra Nagar Mahapalika, Agra*, : [1973]3SCR777 . It was held that where the authorities could not have taken any action against the dealer and their order was invalid, 'it is immaterial that the respondents had acted bonafide and in the interest of preservation of public health. Their motive may be good but their orders are illegal. They would accordingly be liable for any loss caused to the appellants by their action.' The theoretical concept that King can do no wrong has been abandoned in England itself and the State is now held responsible for tortuous act of its servants. The first Law Commission constituted after coming into force of the Constitution on liability of the State in Tort, observed that the old distinction between sovereign and non-sovereign functions should no longer be invoked to determine liability of the State. Friedmann observed,

It is now increasingly necessary to abandon the lingering fiction of a legally indivisible State, and of a feudal conception of the Crown, and to substitute for it the principle of legal liability where the State, either directly or through incorporated public authorities, engages in activities of a commercial, industrial or managerial character. The proper test is not an impracticable distinction between

government and non-governmental functional, but the nature and form of the activity in question.

Even *M/s. Kasturi Lal Ralia Ram Jain v. State of Uttar Pradesh* : (1966) IILLJ583SC did not provide any immunity for tortuous acts of public servants committed in discharge of statutory function if it was not referable to sovereign power. Since house construction or for that matter any service hired by a consumer or facility availed by him is not a sovereign function of the State the ratio of *Kasturi Lal* (supra) could not stand in way of the Commission awarding compensation. We respectfully agree with Mathew, J., in *Shyam Sunder v. State of Rajasthan* : [1974]3SCR549 that it is not necessary, 'to consider whether there is any rational dividing line between the so-called sovereign and proprietary and commercial functions for determining the liability of the State'. In any case the law has always maintained that the public authorities who are entrusted with statutory function cannot act negligently. As far back as 1878 the law was succinctly explained in *Geddis v. Proprietors of Bonn Reservoir*, (1878) 3 App. Cas. 430 thus,

I take it, without citing cases, that it is now thoroughly well established that no action will lie for doing that which the Legislature has authorised, if it be done without negligence, although it does occasion damage to anyone; but an action does lie for doing what the Legislature has authorised, if it be done negligently.

Under our Constitution sovereignty vests in the people. Every limb of the constitutional machinery is obliged to be people oriented. No functionary in exercise of statutory power can claim immunity, except to the extent protected by the Statute itself. Public authorities acting in violation of constitutional or statutory provisions oppressively are accountable for their behaviour before authorities created under the Statute like the Commission or the courts entrusted with responsibility of maintaining the rule of law. Each hierarchy in the Act is empowered to entertain a complaint by the consumer for value of the goods or services and compensation. The word 'compensation' is again of very wide connotation. It has not been defined in the Act. According to dictionary it means, 'compensating or being compensated; thing given as recompense;'. In legal sense

it may constitute actual loss or expected loss and may extend to physical, mental or even emotional suffering, insult or injury or loss. Therefore, when the Commission has been vested with the jurisdiction to award value of goods or services and compensation it has to be construed widely enabling the Commission to determine compensation for any loss or damage suffered by a consumer which in law is otherwise included in wide meaning of compensation. The provision in our opinion enables a consumer to claim and empowers the Commission to redress any injustice done to him Any other construction would defeat the very purpose of the Act. The Commission or the forum in the Act is thus entitled to award not only value of the goods or services but also to compensate a consumer for injustice suffered by him.

9. Facts in Civil Appeal No. 6237 of 1990 may now be adverted as it is the only appeal in which the National Commission while exercising its appellate power under the Act not only affirmed the finding of State Commission directing the appellant to pay the value of deficiency in service but even directed to pay compensation for harassment and agony to the respondent. The Lucknow Development Authority with a view to ease the acute housing problem in the city of Lucknow undertook development of land and formed plots of different categories/sizes and constructed dwelling units for people belonging to different income groups. After the Construction was complete the authority invited applications from persons desirous of purchasing plots or dwelling house. The respondent applied on the prescribed form for registration for allotment of a flat in the category of Middle Income Group (M.I.G.) in Gomti Nagar Scheme in Lucknow on cash down basis. Since the number of applicants was more, the authority decided to draw lots in which flat no. 11/75 in Vinay Khand-II was allotted to the respondent on 26th April 1988. He deposited a sum of Rs. 6132 on July 2, 1988 and a sum of Rs. 1,09,975 on July 29, 1988. Since the entire payment was made in July 1988 the flat was registered on 18th August 1988. Thereafter the appellant by a letter dated 23rd August 1988 directed its Executive Engineer-VII to hand over the possession of the flat to the respondent. This information was given to him on 30th November 1988, yet the flat was not delivered as the construction work was not complete. The respondent approached the authority but no steps were taken nor possession was handed over. Consequently he filed a complaint

before the District Forum that even after payment of entire amount in respect of cash down scheme the appellant was not handing over possession nor they were completing the formalities and the work was still incomplete. The State Commission by its order dated 15th February 1990 directed the appellant to pay 12% annual simple interest upon the deposit made by the respondent for the period 1.1.89 to 15.2.90. The appellant was further directed to handover possession of the flat without delay after completing construction work upto June 1990. The Commission further directed that if it was not possible for the appellant to complete the construction then it should hand over possession of the flat to the respondent by 5th April 1990 after determining the deficiencies and the estimated cost of such deficient construction shall be refunded to the respondent latest by 20th April 1990. The appellant instead of complying with the order approached the National Commission and raised the question of jurisdiction. It was overruled. And the appeal was dismissed. But the cross appeal of the respondent was allowed and it was directed that since the architect of the appellant had estimated in October 1989 the cost of completing construction at Rs. 44615 the appellant shall pay the same to the respondent. The Commission further held that the action of the appellant amounted to harassment mental torture and agony of the respondent, therefore, it directed the appellant to pay a sum of Rs. 10,000 as compensation.

10. Who should pay the amount determined by the Commission for harassment and agony, the statutory authority or it should be realised from those who were responsible for it. Compensation as explained includes both the just equivalent for loss of goods or services and also for sufferance of injustice. For instance in Civil Appeal No... of 1993 arising out of S.L.P. (civil) No. 659 of 1991 the Commission directed the Bangalore Development Authority to pay Rs. 2,446 to the consumer for the expenses incurred by him in getting the lease-cum-sale agreement registered as it was additional expenditure for alternative site allotted to him. No misfeasance was found. The moment the authority came to know of the mistake committed by it it took immediate action by allotting alternative site to the respondent. It was compensation for exact loss suffered by the respondent. It arose in due discharge of duties. For such acts or omissions the loss suffered has to be made good by the authority itself. But when the sufferance is due to malafide

or oppressive or capricious acts etc. of a public servant, then the nature of liability changes. The Commission under the Act could determine such amount if in its opinion the consumer suffered injury to what is called misfeasance of the officers by the English courts. Even in England where award of exemplary or aggravated damages for insult etc. to a person has now been held to be punitive exception has carved out if the injury is due to, 'oppressive, arbitrary or unconstitutional action by servants of the government' (Salmond and Heuston on the Law of Torts). Misfeasance in public office is explained by Wade in his book on Administrative Law thus.

Even where there is no ministerial duty as above, and even where no recognised tort such as trespass, nuisance, or negligence is committed, public authorities or officers may be liable in damages for malicious, deliberate or injurious wrongdoing. There is thus a tort which has been called misfeasance in public office, and which includes malicious abuse of power, deliberate maladministration, and perhaps also other unlawful acts causing injury.

The jurisdiction and power of the courts to indemnify a citizen for injury suffered due to abuse of power by public authorities is founded as observed by Lord Hailsham in *Cassell and Co. Ltd. v. Broome and Anr.* (1972) AC 1027 on the principle that, 'an award of exemplary damages can serve a useful purpose in vindicating the strength of law'. An ordinary citizen or a common man is hardly equipped to match the might of the State or its instrumentalities. That is provided by the rule of law. It acts as a check an arbitrary and capricious exercise of power. In *Rookers v. Barnard and Ors.* (1964) AC 1129 it was observed by Lord Devlin, 'the servants of the government are also the servants of the people and the use of their power must always be subordinate to their duty of service'. A public functionary if he acts maliciously or oppressively and the exercise of power results in harassment and agony then it is not an exercise of power but its abuse. No law provides protection against it. He who is responsible for it must suffer it. Compensation or damage as explained earlier may arise even when the officer discharges his duty honestly and bonafide. But when it arises due to arbitrary or capricious behaviour then it loses its individual character and assumes social significance. Harassment of a common man by public authorities is socially

abhorring and legally impermissible. It may harm him personally but the injury to society is far more grievous. Crime and corruption thrive and prosper in the society due to lack of public resistance. Nothing is more damaging than the feeling of helplessness. An ordinary citizen instead of complaining and fighting succumbs to the pressure of undesirable functioning in offices instead of standing against it. Therefore the award of compensation for harassment by public authorities not only compensates the individual, satisfies him personally but helps in curing social evil. It may result in improving the work culture and help in changing the outlook (sic) in his book 'Administrative Law' has observed that it is to the credit of public authorities that there are simply few reported English decisions on this form of malpractice, namely, misfeasance in public offices which includes malicious use of power, deliberate maladministration and perhaps also other unlawful acts causing injury. One of the reasons for this appears to be development of law which, apart, from other factors succeeded in keeping a salutary check on the functioning in the government or, semi- government offices by holding the officers personally responsible for their capricious or even ultra vires action resulting in injury or loss to a citizen by awarded damages against them. Various decisions rendered from time to time have been referred by Wade on Misfeasance by Public Authorities. We shall refer to some of them to demonstrate how necessary it is for our society. In *Ashby v. White* (1703) 2 Ld. Ray. 938 the House of Lords invoked the principle of *ubi jus ibi remedium* in favour of an elector who was wrongfully prevented from voting and decreed the claim of damages. The ratio of this decision has been applied and extended by English courts in various situations. In *Roncarelli v. Duplessis* (1959) 16 DLR (2d) 689 the Supreme Court of Canada awarded damages against the Prime Minister of Quebec personally for directing the cancellation of a restaurant-owner's liquor licence solely because the licensee provided bail on many occasions for fellow members of the sect of Jehovah's Witnesses, which was then unpopular with the authorities. It was observed that 'what could be more malicious than to punish this licensee for having done what he had an absolute right to do in a matter utterly irrelevant to the Alcoholic Liquor Act? Malice in the proper sense is simply acting for a reason and purpose knowingly foreign to the administration, to which was added here the element of intentional punishment by what was virtually vocation outlawry.' In *Smith v. East*

Elloe Rural District Council (1956) AC 736 the House of Lords held that an action for damages might proceed against the clerk of a local authority personally on the ground that he had procured the compulsory purchase of the plaintiffs property wrongfully and in bad faith. In *Perrington v. Thomson* (1959) VR 236 the Supreme Court of Victoria awarded damages for exercising a power the authorities knew they did not possess. A licensing inspector and a police officer ordered the plaintiff to close his hotel and cease supplying liquor. He obeyed and filed a suit for the resultant loss. The Court observed, 'Now I take it to be perfectly clear, that if a public officer abuses his office, either by an act of omission or commission, and the consequence of that is an injury to an individual, an action may be maintained against such public officer'. In *Wood v. Blaire*, *The Times*, 3, 4, 5 July 1957 a dairy farmer's manageress contracted typhoid fever and the local authority served notices forbidding him to sell milk, except under certain conditions. These notices were void, and the farmer was awarded damages on the ground that the notices were invalid and that the plaintiff was entitled to damages of misfeasance.' This was done even though the finding was that the officers had acted from the best motives.

11. Today the issue thus is not only of award of compensation but who should bear the brunt. The concept of authority and power exercised by public functionaries has many dimensions. It has undergone tremendous change with passage of time and change in socio-economic outlook. The authority empowered to function under a Statute while exercising power discharges public duty. It has to act to subserve general welfare and common good. In discharging this duty honestly and bonafide loss may accrue to any person. And he may claim compensation which may in circumstances be payable. But where the duty is performed capriciously or the exercise of power results in harassment and agony then the responsibility to pay the loss determined should be whose? In a modern society no authority can arrogate to itself the power to act in a manner which is arbitrary. It is unfortunate that matters which require immediate attention linger on and the man in the street is made to run from one end to other with no result. The culture of window clearance appears to be totally dead. Even in ordinary matters a common man who has neither the political backing nor the financial strength to match the inaction in public oriented departments gets frustrated and it erodes the

credibility in the system. Public administration, no doubt involves a vast amount of administrative discretion which shields the action of administrative authority. But where it is found that exercise of discretion was mala fide and the complainant is entitled to compensation for mental and physical harassment then the officer can no more claim to be under protective cover. When a citizen seeks to recover compensation from a public authority in respect of injuries suffered by him for capricious exercise of power and the National Commission finds it duly proved then it has a statutory obligation to award the same? It was never more necessary than today when even social obligations are regulated by grant of statutory powers. The test of permissive form of grant are over. It is now imperative and implicit in the exercise of power that it should be for the sake of society. When the Court directs payment of damages or compensation against the State the ultimate sufferer is the common man. It is the tax payers' money which is paid for inaction of those who are entrusted under the Act to discharge their duties in accordance with law. It is, therefore, necessary that the Commission when it is satisfied that a complainant is entitled to compensation for harassment or mental agony or oppression, which finding of course should be recorded carefully on material and convincing circumstances and not lightly, then it should further direct the department concerned to pay the amount to the complainant from the public fund immediately but to recover the same from those who are found responsible for such unpardonable behaviour by dividing it proportionately where there are more than one functionaries.

12. For these reasons all the appeals are dismissed. In Appeal No. 6237 of 1990 it is further directed that the Lucknow Development Authority shall fix the responsibility of the officers who were responsible for causing harassment and agony to the respondent within a period of six months from the date a copy of this order is produced or served on it. The amount of compensation of Rs. 10,000 awarded by the Commission for mental harassment shall be recovered from such officers proportionately from their salary. Compliance of this order shall be reported to this Court within one month after expiry of the period granted for determining the responsibility. The Registrar General is directed to send a copy of this order to the Secretary, Lucknow Development Authority immediately.

13. In Appeal Nos. 6237 of 1990, 5257 of 1990, 3963 of 1989 and 2954-59 of 1992 the appellant shall pay costs to the contesting respondents which is assessed at Rs. 5,000 in each case. Since the respondents have not put in appearance in other appeals there shall be no order as to costs.

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