



MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION SERIES

COMPANIES ACT 2013

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Question: Mr. Dhruv was appointed as an employee of Sunmoon Timber Private Limited on the condition that if he were to leave his employment, he will not solicit customers of the company. After some time, he was fired from company. He set up his own business under proprietorship and undercut Sunmoon Timber Private Limited's prices. On the legal advice from his legal consultant and to refrain from the provisions of breach of contract, he formed a new company under the name Seven Stars Timbers Private Limited. In this company, his wife and a friend of Mr. Dhruv were the sole shareholders and directors. They took over Dhruv's business and continued it. Sunmoon Timber Private Limited filed a suit against Seven Stars Timbers Private Limited for violation of contract. Seven Stars Timbers Private Limited argued that the contract was entered into between Mr. Dhruv and Sunmoon Timber Private Limited and as a company has separate legal entity, Seven Stars Timbers Private Limited has not violated the terms of agreement. Explain with reasons, whether separate legal entity between Mr. Dhruv and Seven Stars Timbers Private Limited will be disregarded?

Answer: It was decided by the court in the case of *Gilford Motor Co. Vs. Horne*, if the company is formed simply as a mere device to evade legal obligations, though this is only in limited and discrete circumstances, courts can pierce the corporate veil. In other words, if the company is mere sham or cloak, the separate legal entity can be disregarded.

On considering the decision taken in *Gilford Motor Co. Vs. Horne* and facts of the problem given, it is very much clear that Seven Stars Timbers Private Limited was formed just to evade legal obligations of the agreement between Mr. Dhruv and Sunmoon Timber Private Limited. Hence, Seven Stars Timbers Private Limited is just a sham or cloak and the separate legal entity between Mr. Dhruv and Seven Stars Timbers Private Limited should be disregarded.

Question: AK Private Limited has borrowed Rs.36 crore from BK Finance Limited. However, as per memorandum of AK Private Limited, the maximum borrowing power of the company is Rs.30 crore. Examine whether AK Private Limited is liable to pay this debt? State the remedy, if any available to BK Finance Limited.

Answer: This case is governed by the 'Doctrine of Ultra Vires'. According to this doctrine, any act done, or a contract made by the company which travels beyond the powers of the company conferred upon it by its Memorandum of Association is wholly void and inoperative in law and is therefore not binding on the company.

This is because the Memorandum of Association of the company is, in fact, its charter; it defines its constitution and the scope of the powers of the company.

Hence, a company cannot depart from the provisions contained in the memorandum however imperative may be the necessity for the departure. Hence, any agreement ultra vires the company shall be null and void.

i. **Whether AK Private Limited is liable to pay the debt?**

As per the facts given, AK Private Limited borrowed Rs.36 crore from BK Finance Limited which is beyond its borrowing power of Rs.30 crore.

Hence, contract for borrowing of Rs.36 crore, being ultra vires the Memorandum of Association and thereby is void. AK Private Limited is not, therefore, liable to pay the debt.

ii. **Remedy available to BK Finance Limited:**

In light of the legal position explained above, BK Finance Limited cannot enforce the said transaction and thus has no remedy against the company for recovery of the money lent. BK Finance limited may take action against the directors of AK Private Limited as it is the personal liability of its directors to restore the borrowed funds.

Question: Mike LLC incorporated in Singapore having an office in Pune, India. Analyze whether Mike LLC would be called a foreign company as per the provisions of the Companies Act, 2013? Also explain the meaning of foreign company.

Answer: Foreign Company [Section 2(42) of the Companies Act, 2013]: It means any company or body corporate incorporated outside India which—

- (i) has a place of business in India whether by itself or through an agent, physically or through electronic mode; and
- (ii) conducts any business activity in India in any other manner.

As Mike LLC is incorporated in Singapore and having a place of business in Pune, India, it is a foreign Company.

Question: Nolimit Private Company is incorporated as unlimited company having share capital of Rs.10,00,000. One of its creditors, Mr. Samuel filed a suit against a shareholder Mr. Innocent for recovery of his debt against Nolimit Private Company. Mr. Innocent has given his plea in the court that he is not liable as he is just a shareholder. Explain whether Mr. Samuel will be successful in recovering his dues from Mr. Innocent?

Answer: Section 2(92) of Companies Act, 2013, provides that an unlimited company means a company not having any limit on the liability of its members. The liability of each member extends to the whole amount of the company's debts and liabilities, but he will be entitled to claim contribution from other members. As long as the company is a going concern the liability on the shares is the only liability which can be enforced by the company. The creditors can institute proceedings for winding up of the company for their claims. The official liquidator may call the members for their contribution towards the liabilities and debts of the company, which can be unlimited.

On the basis of above, it can be said that Mr. Samuel cannot directly claim his dues against the company from Mr. Innocent, the shareholder of the company even the company is an unlimited company. Mr. Innocent is liable upto his share capital. His unlimited liability will arise when official liquidator calls the members for their contribution towards the liabilities and debts of the company at the time of winding up of company.

Question: A Company registered under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, has been consistently making profits for the past 5 years after a major change in the management structure. Few members contented that they are entitled to receive dividends. Can the company distribute dividend? If yes, what is the maximum percentage of dividend that can be distributed as per provisions of the Companies Act, 2013? Also, to discuss this along with other regular matters, the company held a general meeting by giving only 14 days' notice. Is this valid?

Answer: A company registered under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013 is prohibited from the payment of any dividends to its members.

Hence in the given case, the contention of the members to distribute dividend from the profits earned is wrong.

Also, Section 8 company is allowed to call a general meeting by giving 14 days instead of 21 days.

Question: In the Flower Fans Private Limited, there are only 5 members. All of them go in a boat on a pleasure trip into an open sea. The boat capsizes and all of them died being drowned. Explain with reference to the provisions of Companies Act, 2013:

- A. Is Flower Fans Private Limited no longer in existence?
- B. Further is it correct to say that a company being an artificial person cannot own property and cannot sue or be sued?

Answer:

- A. **Perpetual Succession** - A company on incorporation becomes a separate legal entity. It is an artificial legal person and have perpetual succession which means even if all the members of a company die, the company still continues to exist. It has permanent existence.

The existence of a company is independent of the lives of its members. It has a perpetual succession. In this problem, the company will continue as a legal entity. The company's existence is in no way affected by the death of all its members.

- B. **The statement given is incorrect.** A company is an artificial person as it is created by a process other than natural birth. It is legal or judicial as it is created by law. It is a person since it is clothed with all the rights of an individual. Further, the company being a separate legal entity can own property, have banking account, raise loans, incur liabilities and enter into contracts. Even members can contract with company, acquire right against it or incur liability to it. It can sue and be sued in its own name. It can do everything which any natural person can do except be sent to jail, take an oath, marry or practice a learned profession. Hence, it is a legal person in its own sense.

Question: Articles of Association of XYZ Private Limited provides that Board of Directors (BOD) can take the loan upto Rs. 5,00,000 for Company by passing the board resolution. In that case, the loan amount is in excess of the limit, special resolution is required to be passed in general meeting. Due to urgent needs of funds, BOD applied for loan in a reputed bank for Rs.10,00,000 without passing the resolution in the general meeting. BOD gave an undertaking to bank that Special Resolution has been passed for such loan. The bank on believing on such undertaking lend the money. On demanding the repayment of loan, company denied the payment as act was ultra vires to company. Kindly, advise.

Answer: According to doctrine of Indoor Management, persons dealing with the Company are presumed to have read the registered documents and to see that the proposed dealing is not inconsistent therewith, but they are not bound to do more; they need not enquire into the regularity of internal proceedings as required by Memorandum and Articles. This was also decided in case of *Royal British Bank Vs. Turquand*

In the instant case, XYZ Private Limited have taken loan from reputed bank for Rs.10,00,000 by passing Board Resolution while Special Resolution was necessary for such amount. BOD gave an undertaking to bank that Special Resolution has been passed for such loan. The bank on believing on such undertaking lends the money. On demanding the repayment of loan, company denied the payment as act was ultra vires to company.

On the basis of provisions of doctrine of indoor management, the bank can claim the amount of his loan from the company. The bank can believe on the undertaking given by board and no need to enquire further.

Question: Explain the classification of the companies on the basis of control as per the Companies Act, 2013.

Answer: In line with the Companies Act, 2013, following are the classification of the Companies on the basis of control:

- a. **Holding and subsidiary companies:** 'Holding and subsidiary' companies are relative terms.

A company is a holding company in relation to one or more other companies, means a company of which such companies are subsidiary companies. [Section 2(46)]

For the purposes of this clause, the expression "company" includes any body corporate.

Whereas section 2(87) defines "subsidiary company" in relation to any other company (that is to say the holding company), means a company in which the holding company-

- i. controls the composition of the Board of Directors or
- ii. exercises or controls more than one-half of the total voting power either at its own or together with one or more of its subsidiary companies:

Provided that such class or classes of holding companies as may be prescribed shall not have layers of subsidiaries beyond such numbers as may be prescribed.

b. **Associate company [Section 2(6)]:** In relation to another company, means a company in which that other company has a significant influence, but which is not a subsidiary company of the company having such influence and includes a joint venture company.

Explanation. – For the purpose of this clause –

- i. the expression "significant influence" means control of at least twenty per cent of total voting power, or control of or participation in business decisions under an agreement
- ii. the expression "joint venture" means a joint arrangement whereby the parties that have joint control of the arrangement have rights to the net assets of the arrangement

The term "Total Share Capital", means the aggregate of the -

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2. Convertible preference share capital.

Question: ABC Limited was into sale and purchase of iron rods. This was the main object of the company mentioned in the Memorandum of Association. The company entered into a contract with Mr. John for some finance related work. Later on, the company repudiated the contract as being ultra vires.

With reference to the same, briefly explain the doctrine of "ultravires" under the Companies Act, 2013. What are the consequences of ultravires acts of the company?

Answer: Doctrine of ultra vires: The meaning of the term ultra vires is simply "beyond (their) powers". The legal phrase "ultra vires" is applicable only to acts done in excess of the legal powers of the doers. This presupposes that the powers in their nature are limited. It is a fundamental rule of Company Law that the objects of a company as stated in its memorandum can be departed from only to the extent permitted by the Act, thus far and no further. In consequence, any act done or a contract made by the company which travels beyond the powers not only of the directors but also of the company is wholly void and inoperative in law and is therefore not binding on the company.

Since the memorandum is a "public document", it is open to public inspection. Therefore, when one deals with a company one is deemed to know about the powers of the company. If in spite of this you enter into a transaction which is ultra vires the company, you cannot enforce it against the company.

An act which is ultra vires the company being void, cannot be ratified even by the unanimous consent of all the shareholders of the company.

Hence in the given case, ABC Limited cannot enter into a contract outside the purview of its object clause of Memorandum of Association as it becomes ultra vires and thus null and void.

Question: An employee Mr. Karan signed a contract with his employer company ABC Limited that he will not solicit the customers after leaving the employment from the company.

But after Mr. Karan left ABC Limited, he started up his own company PQR Limited and he started soliciting the customers of ABC Limited for his own business purposes.

ABC Limited filed a case against Mr. Karan for breach of the employment contract and for soliciting their customers for own business. Mr. Karan contended that there is corporate veil between him, and his company and he should not be personally held liable for this.

In this context, the company ABC Limited seek your advice as to the meaning of corporate veil and when the veil can be lifted to make the owners liable for the acts done by a company?

Answer: Corporate Veil: Corporate Veil refers to a legal concept whereby the company is identified separately from the members of the company.

The term Corporate Veil refers to the concept that members of a company are shielded from liability connected to the company's actions. If the company incurs any debts or contravenes any

laws, the corporate veil concept implies that members should not be liable for those errors. In other words, they enjoy corporate insulation.

Thus, the shareholders are protected from the acts of the company.

However, under certain exceptional circumstances the courts lift or pierce the corporate veil by ignoring the separate entity of the company and the promoters and other persons who have managed and controlled the affairs of the company. Thus, when the corporate veil is lifted by the courts, the promoters and persons exercising control over the affairs of the company are held personally liable for the acts and debts of the company.

The following are the cases where company law disregards the principle of corporate personality or the principle that the company is a legal entity distinct and separate from its shareholders or members:

- (i) To determine the character of the company i.e. to find out whether co-enemy or friend.
- (ii) To protect revenue/tax
- (iii) To avoid a legal obligation
- (iv) Formation of subsidiaries to act as agents
- (v) Company formed for fraud/improper conduct or to defeat law

Based on the above provisions and leading case law of *Gilford Motor Co. Vs Horne*, the company PQR Limited was created to avoid the legal obligation arising out of the contract, therefore that employee Mr. Karan and the company PQR Limited created by him should be treated as one and thus veil between the company and that person shall be lifted. Karan has formed the only for fraud/improper conduct or to defeat the law. Hence, he shall be personally held liable for the acts of the company.