

IN THE INCOME TAX APPELLATE TRIBUNAL

NAGPUR BENCH, NAGPUR

BEFORE SHRI V. DURGA RAO, JUDICIAL MEMBER

SMC MATTER

ITA no.293/Nag./2023

(Assessment Year : 2017-18)

M/s. NEERI Co-operative Credit Society
NEERI, Wardha Road, Nagpur 440 020
PAN – AAAAN82163D

..... Appellant

v/s

Income Tax Officer
Ward-1(4), Nagpur

..... Respondent

Assessee by : Ms. Shrishti Pande
Revenue by : Shri Abhay Y. Marathe

Date of Hearing – 02/09/2024

Date of Order – 09/09/2024

ORDER

The present appeal has been filed by the assessee challenging the impugned order dated 31/01/2023, passed by the learned Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals), National Faceless Appeal Centre, Delhi, [“learned CIT(A)”], for the assessment year 2017-18.

2. In its appeal, the assessee has raised following grounds:-

“In the facts and circumstances of the case and in law, the learned C.I.T. [A] has grossly erred in denying deduction u/s 80P(2)(a)(i) of the I.T. Act 1961 to the appellant in respect of interest income of Rs.1,66,496/- earned from fixed deposits kept by it with State Bank of India and has further erred in taxing the said income u/s 56 of the I. T. Act, 1961. The aforesaid addition being patently illegal, bad in law, arbitrary, perverse and devoid of merits the same

may please be deleted and it may please be held that the aforesaid interest income is exempt u/s 80P(2)(a)(i) of the I. T. Act, 1961."

3. During the course of hearing, the Registry has pointed out that there is a delay of 142 days in filing the present appeal by the assessee. The assessee has filed Affidavit-cum-application dated 11/07/2023, duly sworn in, seeking condonation of delay. The reason for the delay in filing the appeal by the assessee is stated in its application to be that the assessee did not receive physical copy of the first appellate order. Para-3 and 4 of the Affidavit-cum-application are reproduced below:-

"3. That, I opened the Income Tax website to check status of pending appeal and I realized that the Order u/s 250 of the Act has already been passed on 31/01/2023. However, we did not receive any physical copy of the said order till date.

4. That the Appeal should have been preferred by 01/04/2023, but as we did not know when the Appeal Order was passed, we did not get an opportunity to prefer the appeal. As such the Appeal is being preferred today, i.e. on 11/07/2023, which 142 is delayed by 10 days."

4. However, despite the delay, in the interest of justice, we are of the opinion that the assessee is prevented in filing its appeal belatedly and thus the delay of 142 days in filing the present appeal is hereby condoned. We now proceed to dispose off the appeal on merit.

5. Brief facts of the case are, the assessee is an Employee's Co-operative Credit Society for the employees working at National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI). For the year under consideration, the assessee Society filed its return of income on 11/12/2017, declaring total income at ₹ nil. The case of the assessee was selected for scrutiny and notice

under section 143(2) Income Tax Act, 1961 ("*the Act*") was issued through ITBA portal. The assessee filed its reply through online portal. However, the Assessing Officer, during the assessment proceedings, had determined the taxable income after disallowing a deduction of ₹ 1,66,496, received from State Bank of India on account of interest under section 80P of the Act.

6. When the matter came up hearing before the first appellate authority, the learned CIT(A), following the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *The Totgars' Co-operative Sale Society Ltd. v/s ITO*, [2010] 188 taxman 282 (SC). The relevant operative part of the order is reproduced below:–

"DECISION

The Appellant is an Employees' Credit Co-operative Society registered under Maharashtra Co-operative Society Act, 1960. The members of this co-operative society are employees of National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur. The primary objective of the Appellant is to accept deposits from its members and provide credit facility to them as per the provisions of incorporation of the Appellant society.

The assessment order was passed on 15.10.2019, disallowing the interest income earned by Appellant on saving bank deposit and FD with State Bank of India, totalling to Rs. 1,66,496/- According to the AO, interest income is allowed as deduction only if deposits are made with any other co-operative society, and not allowed if deposit is made with scheduled commercial bank. As the interest income earned by the Appellant of Rs.1,66,496/- was on account of deposit with SBI, the same was held to be not eligible for deduction u/s 80P of the Act vide Order dated 15.10.2019, against which the Appellant has preferred the present appeal.

Respectfully following the decision of the Supreme Court in Totgar's Cooperative Sale Society Ltd. 322 ITR 283 (SC), I refuse to interfere with the order of the AO."

7. We have heard the arguments of rival parties, perused the material available on record and gone through the orders of the authorities below. It is an admitted fact that the assessee is Employee's Co-operative Credit

Society for the employees working at NEERI, Nagpur, and has received interest income of ₹ 1,66,496, which was claimed as deduction under section 80P(2)(a)(i) of the Act. The case of the Assessing Officer is that, interest income received by the assessee is not eligible for deduction under section 80P(2)(a)(i) of the Act. The Assessing Officer has come to the conclusion by following the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in The Totgars' Co-operative Sale Society Ltd. v. ITO, [2010] 188 taxman 282 (SC). We find that similar issue came up for adjudication before the Tribunal, Nagpur Bench, wherein the very same Bench was a party to that order rendered in The Ismailia Urban Co-operative Society v/s ITO, ITA no.122/Nag./2023, order dated 18/06/2024, wherein the Tribunal has considered this issue in detail and held that interest income earned by the assessee trust is eligible for deduction under section 80P(2)(a)(i) of the Act. The relevant portion of the order reproduced below:—

"9. Upon hearing both the counsel and perusing the record, we find that the issue involved is covered in favour of the assessee by a catena of decisions from ITAT as well as a decision of jurisdictional High Court. In this regard we may gainfully refer the Hon'ble Jurisdictional High Court decision in the case of CIT vs. Solapur Nagri Audyogik Sahakari Bank Ltd. 182 Taxman 231 wherein the following question was raised.

"Whether the interest income received by a Co-operative Bank from investments made in Kisan Vikas Patra ('KVP' for short) and Indira Vikas Patra ('IVP' for short) out of voluntary reserves is income from banking business exempt under Section 80P(2)(a)(i) of the Income Tax Act, 1961?"

After considering the issue, the Hon'ble Jurisdictional High Court has concluded as under :

"12. Therefore, in all these cases, where the surplus funds not immediately required for day-to-day banking were kept in voluntary reserves and invested in KVP/IVP, the interest income received from KVP/IVP would be income from banking business eligible for deduction under section 80P(2)(i) of the Act.

13. In the result, there being no dispute that the funds in the voluntary reserves which were utilized for investment in KVP/IVP by the co-operative

banks were the funds generated from the banking business, we hold that in all these cases the Tribunal was justified in holding that the interest income received by the co-operative banks from the investments in KVP/IVP made out of the funds in the voluntary reserves were eligible for deduction under section 80P(2)(a)(i) of the Act."

The above case law fully supports the assessee's case. Here also surplus funds not immediately required for day to day banking were kept in Bank deposits. The income earned there from thus would be income from banking business eligible for deduction u/s 80P(2)(a)(i).

10. Similarly we find that similar issue was considered by this Tribunal on similar grounds raised by the Revenue in the case of MSEB Engineers Co-Op. Credit Society Ltd., wherein the ITAT, Nagpur Bench, vide order dated 05/05/2016 held as under :

"Upon hearing both the counsel and perusing the records, we find that the above issue is covered in favour of the assessee by the decision of this ITA, referred by the Ld. CIT(A) in his appellate order. The distinction mentioned in the grounds of appeal is not at all sustainable. We further find that this Tribunal again in the case of Chattisgarh Urban Sahakari Sanstha Maryadit Vs. ITO in ITA No. 371/Nag/2012 vide order dated 27.05.2015 has adjudicated similar issue as under:-

"11. Upon careful consideration, we note that identical issue was the subject matter of consideration by ITAT, Ahmedabad Bench decision in the case of Dhanlaxmi Credit Cooperative Society Ltd (supra), in which one of us, learned Judicial Member, was a party. The concluding portion of the Tribunal's decision is as under:

"4. With this brief background, we have heard both the sides. It was explained that the Co-operative Society is maintaining "operations funds" and to meet any eventuality towards repayment of deposit, the Co-operative society is maintaining some liquidated funds as a short term deposit with the banks. This issue was thoroughly discussed by the ITAT "B" Bench Ahmedabad in the case of The Income Tax Officer vs. M/s.Jafari Momin Vikas Co-op Credit Society Ltd., bearing ITA No. 1491/Ahd/2012 (for A.Y. 2009-10) and CO No. 138/Ahd/2012 (by Assessee) order dated 31/10/2012. The relevant portion is reproduced below :-

"19. The issue dealt with by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Totgars (supra) is extracted, for appreciation of facts as under :

What is sought to be taxed under section 56 of the Act is interest income arising on the surplus invested in short term deposits and securities, which surplus was not required for business purposes? The assessee(s) markets the produce of its members whose sale proceeds at times were retained by it. In this case, we are concerned with the tax treatment of such amount. Since the fund created by such retention was not required immediately for business purposes, it was invested in specified securities. The question before us, is whether interest on such deposits/securities, which strictly speaking accrues to the members' account, could be taxed as business income under

section 28 of the Act? In our view, such interest income would come in the category of 'income from other sources' hence, such interest income would be taxable under section 56 of the Act, as rightly held by the assessing officer....."

19.1 However, in the present case, on verification of the balance sheet of the assessee as on 31.3.2009, it was observed that the fixed deposits made were to maintain liquidity and that there was no surplus funds with the assessee as attributed by the Revenue. However, in regard to the case before the Hon'ble Supreme Court –

"(on page 286) 7 Before the assessing officer, it was argued by the assessee(s) that it had invested the funds on short term basis as the funds were not required immediately for business purposes and consequently, such act of investment constituted a business activity by a prudent businessman; therefore, such interest income was liable to be taxed under section 28 and not under section 56 of the Act and, consequently, the assessee(s) was entitled to deduction under section 80P(2)(a)(i) of the Act. The argument was rejected by the assessing officer as also by the Tribunal and the High Court, hence these civil appeals have been filed by the assessee(s).

19.2 From the above, it emerges that

(a) that assessee (issue before the Supreme Court) had admitted before the AO that it had invested surplus funds, which were not immediately required for the purpose of its business, in short term deposits;

(b) that the surplus funds arose out of the amount retained from marketing the agricultural produce of the members;

(c) that assessee carried on two activities, namely, (i) acceptance of deposit and lending by way of deposits to the members; and (ii) marketing the agricultural produce; and

(d) that the surplus had arisen emphatically from marketing of agricultural produces.

19.3 In the present case under consideration, the entire funds were utilized for the purposes of business and there were no surplus funds.

19.4 While comparing the state of affairs of the present assessee with that assessee (before the Supreme Court), the following clinching dissimilarities emerge, namely:

(1) in the case of assessee, the entire funds were utilized for the purposes of business and that there were no surplus funds:-

- in the case of Totgars, it had surplus funds, as admitted before the AO, out of retained amounts on marketing of agricultural produce of its members;

(2) in the case of present assessee, it had not carry out any activity except in providing credit facilities to its members and

that the funds were of operational funds. The only fund available with the assessee was deposits from its members and, thus, there was no surplus funds as such;

- in the case of Totgars, the Hon'ble Supreme Court had not spelt out anything with regard to operational funds;

19.5 Considering the above facts, we find that there is force in the argument of the assessee that the assessee not a co-operative bank, but its nature of business was coupled with banking with its members, as it accepts deposits from and lends the same to its members. To meet any eventuality, the assessee was required to maintain some liquid funds. That was why, it was submitted by the assessee that it had invested in short-term deposits. Furthermore, the assessee had maintained overdraft facility with Dena Bank and the balance as at 31.3.2009 was Rs.13,69,955/- [source : Balance Sheet of the assessee available on record].

19.6 In overall consideration of all the aspects, we are of the considered view that the ratio laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Totgars Co-op Sale Society Ltd (supra) cannot in any way come to the rescue of either the Ld. CIT (A) or the Revenue. In view of the above facts, we are of the firm view that the learned CIT (A) was not justified in coming to a conclusion that the sum of Rs.9,40,639/- was to be taxed u/s 56 of the Act. It is ordered accordingly."

5. Respectfully following the above decision of the Co-ordinate Bench, we hereby hold that the benefit of deduction u/s 80P(2)(a)(i) was rightly granted by Id. CIT(A), however, he has wrongly held that the interest income is taxable u/s 56 of the Act so do not fall under the category of exempted income u/s 80P of the Act. The adverse portion of the view, which is against the assessee, of Id. CIT(A) is hereby reversed following the decision of the Tribunal cited supra, resultantly ground is allowed.

8. We find that the ratio of above case also applies to the present case. As observed in the above case law, in this case also the submissions of the assessee's counsel is that the assessee society is maintaining operational funds and to meet any eventuality towards repayment of deposit the cooperative society is maintaining some liquidated funds as short term deposits with banks. Hence adhering to the doctrine stare decisis, we hold that the assessee should be granted benefit of deduction under section 80P(2)(a)(i). Accordingly, the interest on deposits would qualify for deduction under the said section. Accordingly, we set aside the order of authorities below and decide the issue in favour of assessee. "

4. We further find that batch of similar appeals decided by the ITAT in favour of the assessee has also been considered by the Jurisdictional High Court. The Hon'ble Jurisdictional High Court has duly affirmed of this Tribunal. Accordingly, in the background aforesaid discussion, we do not find infirmity in the order of Ld. CIT(A)."

11. In the background of aforesaid discussion and decisions, we find that CIT (A) has erred in upholding the assessment order. The Appellant Co-operative society is entitled for deduction u/s 80P as claimed in the return."

8. In the above decision, the Co-ordinate Bench has already considered the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in The Totgars' Co-operative Sale Society Ltd. (supra) and held that the facts of this case is distinguishable and not applicable to the facts of the present case. We, therefore, respectfully following the decision of the Co-ordinate Bench in The Ismailia Urban Co-operative Society v/s ITO, ITA no.122/ Nag./2023, order dated 18/06/2024, we set aside the impugned order passed by the learned CIT(A) and hold that the assessee is eligible to claim deduction under section 80P(2)(a)(i) of the Act. Thus, ground raised by the assessee is allowed.

9. In the result, assessee's appeal is allowed.

Order pronounced in the open Court on 09/09/2024

Sd/-
V. DURGA RAO
JUDICIAL MEMBER

NAGPUR, DATED: 09/09/2024

Copy of the order forwarded to:

- (1) The Assessee;
- (2) The Revenue;
- (3) The PCIT / CIT (Judicial);
- (4) The DR, ITAT, Nagpur; and
- (5) Guard file.

Pradeep J. Chowdhury
Sr. Private Secretary

True Copy
By Order

Sr. Private Secretary
ITAT, Nagpur