

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED :27.06.2019

CORAM

THE HON'BLE MR.JUSTICE M.SUNDAR

W.P.No.11643 of 2019

and

W.M.P.No.11872 of 2019

Tmt.K.Tamilarasi

...Petitioner

Vs

1.The Commissioner,
Vellore City Municipal Corporation
Vellore
Vellore District.

2.The Zonal Officer,
Zone-I,
Vellore City Municipal Corporation,
Vellore, Vellore District.

....Respondents

Prayer:- Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India praying to issue a Writ of Certiorarified Mandamus calling for the records pertaining to the property tax demand relating to Assessment No 35/014/01270 dated 20.11.2018 made by the second respondent and quash the same and consequently direct the respondents to re-fix the property tax after following the procedure as required under the Vellore Municipal Corporation Act.

For Petitioner : Mr.Kamadevan.S

For Respondents: Mr.S.Silambanan, Senior Counsel
for Ms.P.Shanthi, Standing Counsel

सत्यमेव जयते
O R D E R

Mr.S.Kamadevan, learned counsel on record for the writ petitioner and Mr.S.Silambanan, learned Senior counsel instructed by Ms.P.Shanthi, learned Standing counsel for the respondents are before this Court.

2. With consent of counsel on both sides, main writ petition is taken up, heard out and is being disposed of. Entire writ petition turns on a very narrow compass, more so owing to the trajectory of the hearing today.

3. Writ petitioner is the owner of a immovable property bearing Door No.535, Maraimalai Adigal Street, Gandhinagar

(East), Vellore-632 006 (hereinafter 'said property' for the sake of brevity, clarity and convenience).

4. Learned counsel for writ petitioner, adverting to the affidavit filed in support of the writ petition, submitted that said property was assessed to half yearly Property Tax at Rs.308/- (Rupees Three Hundred and Eight Only) by the Vellore Municipality and the property tax so assessed and levied was paid without any default. It is the case of the writ petitioner that the property tax of Rs.796/- was paid for upto assessment years 2016-17, 2017-18 without any delay or default.

5. Under the aforesaid circumstances, the writ petitioner was visited with a Demand Notice dated 20.11.2018. Vide this Demand Notice, writ petitioner has been called upon to pay a sum of Rs.35,402/- (Rupees Thirty Five Thousand Four Hundred and Two only) within 15 days of receipt of notice. This notice shall herein be referred as 'impugned notice' for brevity.

6. Vide impugned notice, writ petitioner was also put on notice that if the aforesaid sum of money (which according to the respondents is due towards property tax arrears of the writ petitioner qua said property) is not paid within 15 days, legal action will be taken under Rules 30 to 34 in Schedule IV of Tamil Nadu District Municipalities Act, 1920.

7. From a reading of the impugned notice, it also comes to light that the purported arrears of property tax is for two assessment years namely 2017-18 and 2018-19.

8. Adverting to property tax receipts dated 23.01.2012, 25.09.2012, 14.03.2014, 18.01.2016, 19.01.2016 and 07.11.2017, which have been filed as part of the typed set of papers, learned counsel for writ petitioner submits that property tax as per the existing rate has been duly paid. More particularly, property tax for I/2017-18 and II/2017-18 have been duly paid and there is no dispute or disagreement before this Court in this regard.

9. It is the specific case of the writ petitioner that the writ petitioner was not put on notice about any enhancement of property tax and they were suddenly visited with the impugned notice. Notwithstanding this position, without prejudice to the rights and contentions of writ petitioner, writ petitioner paid the aforesaid tax of Rs.796/- (Rupees Seven Hundred and Ninety Six only) for the assessment years 2016-17 and 2017-2018 also.

10. In the aforesaid circumstances, learned Senior Counsel for the respondents submits that the Act that is applicable to the instant case is 'Vellore City Municipal Corporation Act,

2008 (Tamil Nadu Act 26 of 2008)', hereinafter 'said Act' for brevity and vide Section 8 of the said Act, the provisions of Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation Act, 1981 (Tamil Nadu Act 25 of 1981) have been made applicable to the Vellore Municipality.

11. Learned Senior Counsel in his usual fairness drew the attention of this Court to Section 118 of the 'Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation Act, 1981' (hereinafter 'Coimbatore Act 1981' for brevity) and submitted that before imposing tax for first time or increasing the rate of existing tax, a publication has to be made in a Tamil Newspaper.

12. Learned Senior Counsel submitted that though it is the specific stand of the respondents that said publication has been made, the respondents are not averse to issuing a notice individually to the writ petitioner regarding the proposed enhancement. To be noted, this therefore is a consent order, in the light of the aforesaid stated position that the respondent Municipality which has been articulated before this Court by learned Senior Counsel on instructions.

13. On instructions, it is submitted on behalf of the Vellore Municipality that they would give a notice to the writ petitioner giving details of the proposed assessment together with parameters / determinants and mode of computation for the proposed enhancement (which will be a provisional assessment) call for objections from writ petitioner, thereafter pass a final assessment order after taking into account the objections of writ petitioner and after giving an opportunity of personal hearing to the writ petitioner.

14. Therefore, it follows as a natural sequitur that the impugned notice is to be set aside, as there cannot be any demand of property tax at the enhanced rate until further final assessment order is passed. In this regard, Sanjai Gupta principle laid down by Hon'ble Division Bench in Sanjai Gupta Vs. The Commissioner, Corporation of Chennai reported in 2009 (2) CTC 465 that any demand should be preceded by a final assessment after taking into account the objections of the assessee is relevant.

15. In the light of the narrative supra, by consent of both sides, the following order is passed:

(A) Impugned order bearing Assessment No 35/014/01270 dated 20.11.2018 is set aside.

(B) The respondent shall send a notice to the writ petitioner within a fortnight from the date of receipt

of the order along with details of proposed enhancement of property tax for the said property along with parameters / determinants mode of computation which are used to arrive at the proposed enhancement. This notice will call for objections from the writ petitioner and shall be served on the writ petitioner under due acknowledgment.

(C) Writ petitioner shall send their objections to the aforesaid proposed enhancement / provisional assessment within a fortnight thereafter i.e., from date of receipt of aforesaid notice.

(D) On receipt of objections from writ petitioner, the respondent Municipality shall consider all the objections of the writ petitioner, give an opportunity of personal hearing to the writ petitioner and then pass a final assessment order in accordance with law as expeditiously as possible, in any event within 8 weeks from the date of receipt of the objections from the writ petitioner.

(E) The final assessment order so passed by Vellore Municipal Corporation i.e., respondents shall be communicated to the writ petitioner under due acknowledgment within seven (7) working days from the date of the final assessment order.

(F) Until final assessment order is made, there will be no coercive action against the writ petitioner subject to the condition that the writ petitioner continues to pay property tax at the existing rate.

(G) Though obvious, it is made clear that it is open to the writ petitioner to assail aforesaid final assessment order in a manner known to law (if writ petitioner is not satisfied with final assessment order). If writ petitioner chooses to assail the final assessment order, this order will not impede such legal proceedings.

16. Accordingly, this writ petition is disposed of with the above directions. No costs. Consequently connected miscellaneous petition is closed.

Sd/-
Assistant Registrar(J)

//True Copy//

Sub Assistant Registrar

To

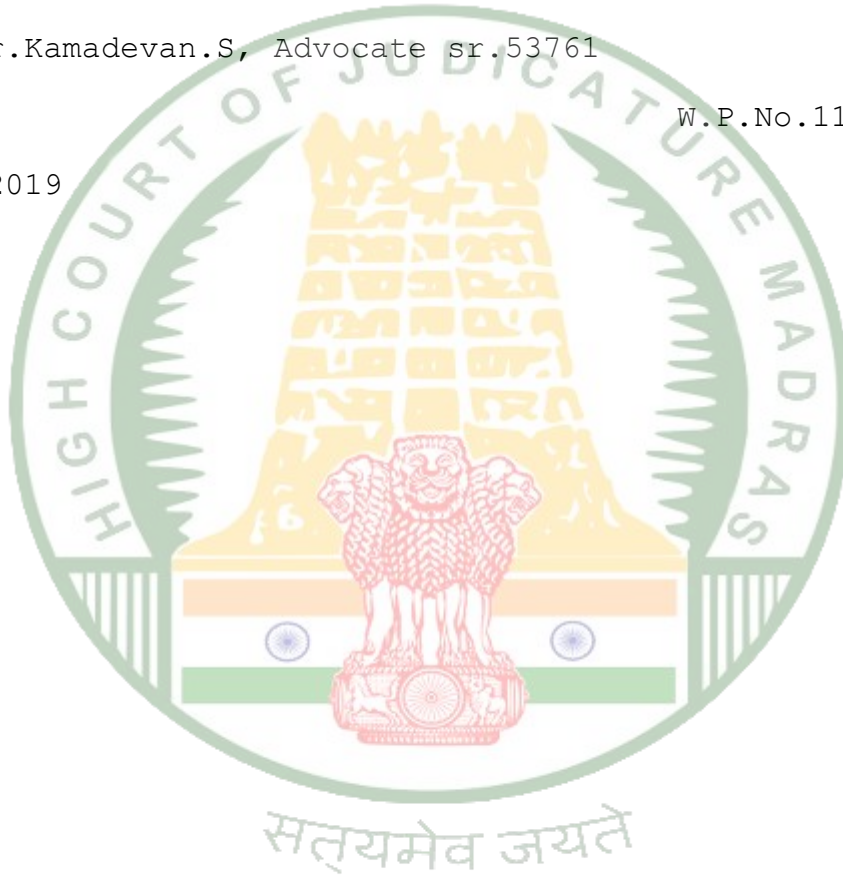
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+1cc to Mr.Kamadevan.S, Advocate sr.53761

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