



# TIMES PROPERTY

Advertorial, Property Promotional Feature

Chennai, September 13, 2014

Realty news you can use

epaper.timesofindia.com

## cityscape

The preference for traditional architecture is slowly making a comeback

**Sangeetha.Nambiar**  
@timesgroup.com

At first glance, Anna Salai or Mount road, as it was known earlier, appears as a dense stockade of limes, reds and chestnuts. The vision soon clears to reveal towers, gables, and casements – the highest glazings shining with the cop-

parture to the so-called 'garish, monstrous buildings'. This is the way the general public sees most buildings that have sprung up in our cities and the cityscape is changing so fast," says Benny Kuriakose, well-known architect, who incorporates vernacular architectural systems with contemporary styles in his work.

While globally the focus has now shifted to green and envi-

tainable buildings and sustainable cities, agrees. "We are in a phase of rapid change. We have to search for new ways of manifesting our cities. We cannot impose rules of the past and have to explore new processes. Aesthetics is not the purview of design alone. It embodies, economy, social, economic concerns and the aspirations of patrons."

According to Dr Suresh Sethuraman, Tamil Nadu State

However, time and space crunch have resulted in modern buildings going vertical and pre-fab materials being used increasingly to meet construction deadlines. "Earlier, a building would take at least over two years to complete. But now most of them are completed well within this time. Hence we see the increasing use of pre-fab materials," says Dr Suresh.

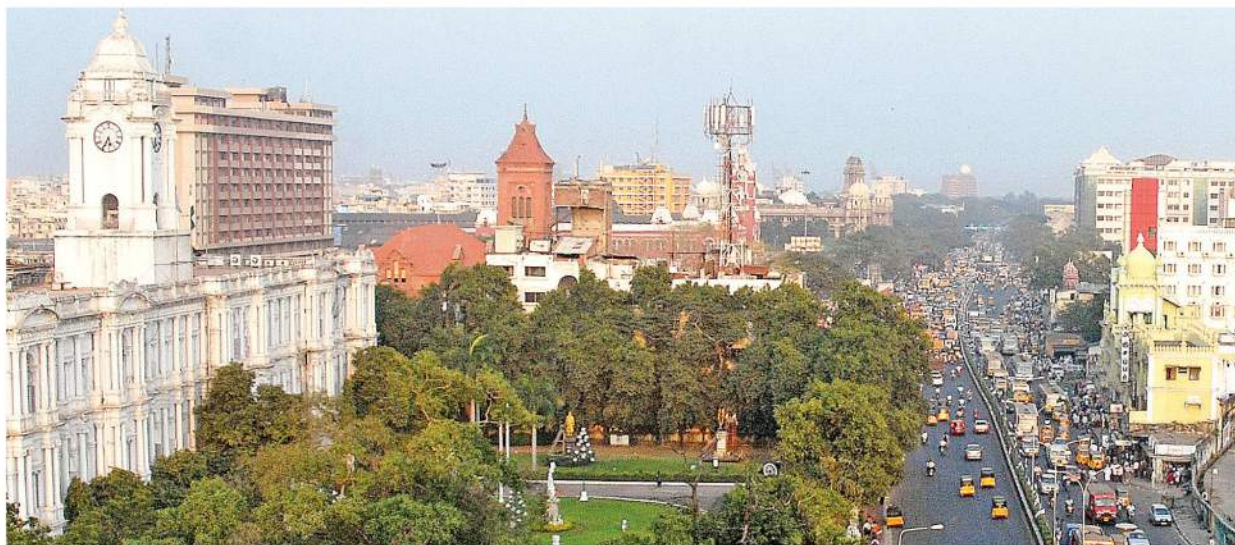
"I feel that there is nothing wrong in going vertical as long as social, economic and environmental aspects are

West, when a new building comes up in an area, the architecture of the existing buildings are taken into account and the new building is in harmony with its surroundings. This is not the case in India. That is why so many new buildings stick out like sore thumbs in older localities.

"This problem is not unique to Chennai. It exists in cities across India. While there is increasing awareness in Mumbai and Delhi about the need for sustainable buildings, our city is

not flexible enough to adapt to the changing surrounds with the competition from the latest shopping malls. The changes which have been happening to our cities are very rapid and it is important that we consider these aspects while designing new buildings. I am hoping that many of the apartment complexes do not become like slums or become obsolete in the near future," he says.

There seems to be a shift in public perception with the growing realisa-



## A TALL ORDER

Chennai boasts of some of the finest buildings of architectural splendour. Do the modern buildings here match up to its formidable past?



pery fire they catch from the sunlit sky.

However, if you look further, steel, glass and concrete structures overshadow traditional lime and wood structures. Triplicane, Sowcarpet, T Nagar, the scene is the same in these parts of Chennai, a city that boasted of some of the finest buildings in ancient and modern times.

Has the city, while on the path of progress, shed its aesthetic architectural lineage of the past? "When the British built their buildings in Chennai, they tried to follow some elements of Indian architecture. The Indo-Sarcenic architecture was the result. After they left India and with the advent of the modern architecture, things began to change. Engineers and architects learnt about steel and concrete but learnt very little about timber and earth. The knowledge of these experts and traditional craftsmen went parallel and the result was the de-

ronmentally sustainable buildings, Benny feels green architecture is not something that can be easily achieved by spending some extra money on a low emitting carpet or by having low heat absorbing glass. "Our traditional buildings were greener, more suitable to the climate, more thermally comfortable and hence less energy consuming. In villages, many buildings are still built in a traditional way. We cannot go back to the old way of construction because society has changed quite a bit and is continuing to change. I strongly feel the solution does not lie in looking towards the West without understanding the basic principles, but to our vernacular architecture," he says.

Durganand Balsavar, city-based architect, urban planner and director of Artes - Human Settlements Research Collaborative, an architectural consultancy firm in the city, who stresses on the need for sus-

**FAST FACT**  
WE ARE IN A PHASE OF RAPID CHANGE. WE HAVE TO SEARCH FOR NEW WAYS OF MANIFESTING OUR CITIES. WE CANNOT IMPOSE RULES OF THE PAST AND HAVE TO EXPLORE NEW PROCESSES

Convener, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), "The harmony between the style of construction and the surrounding areas no longer exists now. We no longer use any elements from the traditional style of architecture. George Town is one area in the city which has a lot of buildings in the traditional style," he says.

Chennai has a legacy of beautiful aesthetic buildings. The Central Railway Station, High Court, Rippon and SBI buildings are among some of the magnificent structures that have stood proudly in the city.

considered. The long term interests of the city should be of prime importance. Architectural thinker Christopher Alexander argued that residential apartments should not be built more than four-storey-high since this is the limit from which a mother on the fourth floor can call a child playing on the ground below," says Benny.

"When the great architect Le Corbusier argued for a vertical city, he said these buildings should be built in the middle of a forest. Only 15 percent should be built up and the rest should be left green. His argument was that technology has grown immensely to help us go high and solve the housing problem. Later, many of his followers removed the social content and were interested only in the profit element, at the cost of a socially sustainable living. The architecture of cities is no longer decided by architects and planners. If our cities have to improve, this trend has to change," he adds.

Dr Suresh adds: "There is a lack of awareness and foresight among the agencies concerned of the need to have socially sustainable buildings. In the

yet to catch up," he says.

While experts agree on the need for stricter legislation, they also feel that there is a need to create better awareness on the issue among all parties concerned. "The first stage would be to create a broader awareness of the need for sustainable practices amongst society at large. There is also a need to refine legislation and create authentic training programmes for professionals involved in the building industry," says Durganand. "I think we need to deal with this on a war footing. Apart from stricter legislation, incentives can be offered to developers in the form of tax breaks," says Dr Suresh.

"I think we are going through a phase and it is going to change in the coming years. A city which is not sustainable will die. A building which is not sustainable will also face the same fate. This is the era where the market plays a greater role," says Benny.

"A shopping complex which was built less than 20 years ago has become obsolete now not because it is structurally unsound, but because it was

tion on the need for environmentally friendly, aesthetic buildings that follow elements of traditional architecture. "The preference for traditional architecture is slowly making a comeback with some residents preferring traditional and vernacular styles for their homes. But it is a very gradual process and will take time to take root," says Dr Suresh.

Durganand adds: "Any city can retain its hope, as long as everyone participates in its urban process and growth. Much greater discussions are now required on the infrastructure - both social and physical."

When the British built their buildings in Chennai, they tried to follow some elements of Indian architecture. The Indo-Sarcenic architecture was the result. After they left India and with the advent of the modern architecture, things began to change. Our traditional buildings were greener, more suitable to the climate, more thermally comfortable and hence less energy consuming. In villages, many buildings are still built in a traditional way. We cannot go back to the old way of construction because society has changed quite a bit and is continuing to change. I strongly feel the solution does not lie in looking towards the West without understanding the basic principles, but to our vernacular architecture  
**Benny Kuriakose, well-known architect**