



360-DEGREE VIEW of a Changing City

Madras Then Chennai Now is a brilliant visual tribute, despite a few notable omissions, to a city's past and present, with some accomplished writing to support the pictures *By V RAMNARAYAN*



The sons of C P Ramaswami Aiyar, a statesman who was directly responsible for the growth of agriculture in Tamil Nadu and Travancore, with their dogs; (below) full-length studio portrait of five women wearing jewellery, c. 1870s



(Above left) "My intention was that the dance now abolished in the temple should create the temple atmosphere on the stage," said Rukmini Devi Arundale, creator of the Kalakshetra Foundation, one of India's oldest art schools; (Above right) classical music as accompaniment at a tea party. Classical music was once restricted to the elite.



(From left to right) Woman auto-rickshaw drivers are starting to make an impact in what used to be a man's world; T Bala-saraswathi and M S Subbulakshmi in a "naughty" 1937 picture; the Tam-Brahms have been inspired by their glitzy North Indian brethren when it comes to Tamil weddings, once a conservative affair



(Top) A panoramic view of Madras Harbour; If Anna Salai is the city's heart, Marina Beach is its life-line. All along the promenade, there are historical buildings, statues and parks; (below right) an old photo of Marina presents a view looking south along the waterfront; a street studio on sand

Madras Then Chennai Now is a collection of outstanding photographs, drawings and paintings of varying hues and styles. It has several breathtaking aerial views of the city and its surrounds, especially of the past, as well as many terrific terrestrial shots of scenes and personalities, both predictable and idiosyncratic.

Neatly divided into two sections—as I guess *Roli Books'* other coffee-table books titled *Then* and *Now* are—it has been written by two authors, Nanditha Krishna focusing on Madras and Tishani Doshi sharing her insights into Chennai with us, with photo researcher and editor Pramod Kapoor collaborating with both.

Historian-environmentalist-culture expert Nanditha Krishna has done a neat job of condensing the tale of the city from its origins to the present into some 15 tightly knit pages of readable prose. While I am not competent to pass judgment on the authenticity of the text, I must compliment the author for an affectionate biography of the city grippingly told. I have reservations about two small parts of her otherwise excellent narrative. She describes as the Indian Mutiny of 1857 what many of us have come to know as the first war of independence. And her brief take on Chennai as against Madras is depressingly negative.

Novelist-poet-dancer Tis-

hani Doshi is somewhat more gung-ho about the metropolis as it is today. For someone of non-Tamil descent born in the city, she seems to love this admittedly chaotic (though rather orderly in comparison with some other cities of India) state capital, even as she calls for action to counter the very urban trends that Nanditha Krishna condemns—its mindless expansion, its "malfication" and its galloping ugliness. The success of her writing lies in its non-elitist perspective, even if it

ji Ganesan (except in a group photo), some of our dedicated educationists and the cricket and hockey greats of the past, are not featured. Nor are some of the most iconic of our classical and film musicians.

Pictures of the old Madras tram service, Carnatic music *cutcheries*, *nagaswar*-led temple processions or early morning groups of *bhajana* singers, the Chepauk cricket ground of yore, Tied Test II, the old Woodlands drive-in restaurant and Udipi cafes, and landmark cinema the-

does betray her educational background and her chosen school of artistic training.

The book's strength as evidenced by its collection of images not often seen elsewhere, garnered from private sources, is perhaps also its shortcoming (if minor), missing out as it does on a few subjects. One notable omission is the Chennai music season in graphic detail.

Among the epoch-making men and women of Madras, prominent personalities like C Rajagopalachari, S Satyamurti, Subramania Bharati, Dr S Rangachari, Kalki Krishnamurthi, Kannadasan, Siva-

atres of the past would have completed the collection.

To continue the nit-picking, the editing, proof-reading and pagination could have been tighter. To give an example, the photo caption on page 128 has three lines ending with initials followed by names on the next lines. Spellings of indigenous words like *Valkai* for *Vazhakai* and *Thirukkalukundram* for *Tirukazhukunram* jar.

Despite these little glitches, the book is a brilliant visual tribute to Madras and Chennai, with some accomplished writing to support the pictures.

