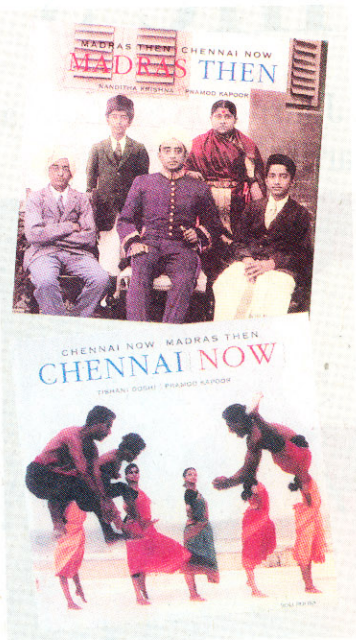


Yesterday segues into today

Launch of the book *Madras Then | Chennai Now* that captures the duality of the dynamic city through rare photographs



AT THE LAUNCH Nanditha Krishna, A. Vellayan, Vyjayanthimala Bali, Tishani Doshi and Pramod Kapoor



When it comes to books, I'm unabashedly polygamous," said Pramod Kapoor, publisher and founder, Roli Books, at the recent launch of the book *Madras Then | Chennai Now* at Madras Club. Sumptuously crafted, it showcases — through rare and some unpublished photographs — the Madras of yore, and the present Chennai. "I'm wearing two hats right now," Kapoor said in his welcome address, "that of the photo editor and a very satisfied publisher." Fourth in Roli's 'Then And Now' series, the book has well-researched text and captions by Nanditha Krishna and Tishani Doshi (for the Madras and the Chennai segments, respectively) and a unique selection of photographs, picked by Kapoor.

The map of a city

Among the photos in the book, his personal favourite, Kapoor said, was a 19th Century map of the city. "It's a remarkable piece of art work." And then there's the rare picture of the 1914 bombing of Madras by Germany. "We were lucky to find that photo. It's part of folklore... grand parents tell grand kids the story!" A contemporary picture of the Foreshore Estate — where the place looks not unlike Manhattan, was singled out for mention. "But it's not as pretty as it looks," Kapoor quipped.

Just as the book is half-and-half about Madras and Chennai (the city it became, after the name change), Tishani Doshi, poet, novelist and journalist, said that she's lived half

her life in Madras, and the other half in Chennai. And just like the name, it is a city of dualities, where tradition and modernity quietly co-exist. "But for all its perceived conservativeness," she said, "it's seductive. People have tried to leave it, only to come back!"

For Nanditha Krishna, historian, environmentalist and writer, the book was a journey back in time. "As an art historian, I enjoyed it tremendously. It's a wonderful record of our beautiful city," she said, adding that many of the photos have elaborate captions. "It tells the story of the city through captions. I went to the British Library in London to research it." The research, in turn, led to discoveries. "Did you know that there was a 'Madras style of painting' in Europe? That has been reproduced in the book. And many such rare and unusual images." One particular mention got the audience's attention. Kapoor said the book had an image of M.S. Subbulakshmi with a cigarette. The picture, he said, was included after much debate. In the book, its caption begins with 'T. Balasaraswathi (left) and M.S. Subbulakshmi in a 'naughty' 1937 studio picture'.

The photographs were sourced from both public and private collections. The major ones, Krishna said, were the British Library, Getty Images, the C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation and M.K. Rangaswamy Iyengar archives, *The Hindu* archives, V. Narayan Swami and for the Chennai Now photos, Nicholas Chorier.

The book has aptly covered all

walks of life, said guest of honour A. Vellayan (executive chairman of the Murugappa Corporate Board and chairman of EID Parry (India)). Politicians, industrialists, sportsmen, educationists, actors, artists, monuments and buildings have all been included he said, before proceeding to draw interesting parallels between the 'then' and 'now' of every category. 'Sports then was played for the game; now it is for endorsement. Monuments then, were architectural marvels; now, it's about maximum FSI,' he said, concluding that then is better than now, except in art, music and cinema. And yet, he wondered, "do I belong to then or now? My mother is better (representative) for then, and my younger son for the now part".

Nostalgic trip

With one foot in Madras and one in Chennai (as Krishna introduced her) Vyjayanthimala Bali, actor, dancer, parliamentarian and chief guest for the evening, released the book. "When Nanditha gave me the book, I first glanced through the photos, and then went through the text. Both were absorbing — Madras then and Chennai now," she said, and listed a few landmarks in the city that have not just survived for long, but also, like the city itself, taken on a new name. Madras, she said, evoked nostalgia; Chennai, while futuristic, thankfully also bubbles with culture. "The book is a must read for anyone who loves the Chennai soil. I love it too."

APARNA KARTHIKEYAN